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THE FOG DEVIL; or, The Skipper of the Flash.

A STORY OF THE GLOUCESTER TRAWLERS.

BY CAPTAIN FRED. WHITTAKER,

AUTHOR OF "NEMO," "KING OF THE TRAMPS," "RED RUDIGER," "THE RUSSIAN SPY," "THE RED RAJAH," "THE IRISH CAPTAIN," "THE MAN IN RED," "DEATH'S HEAD CUIRASSIERS," "PHANTOM KNIGHTS," ETC., ETC.



ONLY ONCE DID HE RISE, THE RAVENOUS CREATURES HANGING ON TO HIM LIKE BULL-DOGS.

The Fog Devil;

OR,

The Skipper of the Flash.

A Story of the Gloucester Trawlers.

BY CAPT. FRED. WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF "THE FLYING DUTCHMAN OF 1880,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A FISHERMAN'S LOVE.

THE spring of 187- was remarkable for the quantity of drift-ice that came down from Baffin's Bay, to float as far south as the latitude of New York city, in the track of European steamers.

The Newfoundland Banks were covered with fleets of bergs, while the fields of ice stretched for hundreds of miles, compelling steamers to lose a day in skirting it, where it was too thick to be pierced, without injury to the ships.

Warm, muggy days on shore, alternating with cold northwester, made the farmers tremble for their fruit buds; but the hardy fishermen of Cape Ann reaped a harvest in spite of the weather, and made it serve their purpose to keep the halibut fresh as it was caught near the ice-floes.

It was in the middle of spring, that year, when a young man, whose handsome, refined face told that he was something more than an ordinary fisherman, in spite of his rough clothes and heavy sea-boots, stood at the back door of a house in the outskirts of Gloucester, with one arm round the waist of a pretty young girl, who leaned both hands on his shoulder and looked into his eyes with a wistful gaze that showed plainly they were parting and that she dreaded it.

"Why, Alice," said the young fisherman soothingly, "it is not like you to be frightened at nothing. The Flash is a good-sea boat, none better, and Darke is the best sailor on the Banks, as well as one of the luckiest. Why should you be alarmed about me, this time?"

The girl clung a little closer.

"I don't know," she half whispered, "I suppose it's because I love you so, Ned. Oh, when will the time come when we can cast off this mystery and show the world how we are? To think that I dare not come down with you to the wharf, to bid you good-by, before them all."

Ned's face turned a little graver, and his voice had a certain half-reproachful ring in it, as he answered, stroking her dark hair:

"I have not made the mystery, Alice. I am willing to go to your father openly now, in my rough fishing clothes, and say to him: 'Sir, I love Alice. We—'"

"Hush! hush!" she cried in an agitated way as she put one pretty hand over his mouth, "you must not say it, even here. Oh, you don't know how hard he is, Ned. If he knew all, I almost think he would turn me into the street, only child though I be."

"I wish he would," interrupted Ned, frowning in an angry manner. "I declare I wish he would, Alice. You'll never have pluck enough to face the world with me, till he does. Just because the judge is an obstinate—"

"Hush, Ned," she said, pleadingly. "Remember he's my father, dear. He loves me dearly and does it all for the best, Ned. He knows what a hard thing poverty is. He was poor once. He wants to save me from that. You know it's only that. He likes you well enough, Ned."

The young man looked away toward the harbor with a thoughtful, bitter sort of smile.

'Yes, he liked me well enough till I was made a beggar without any fault of my own and now he wants to throw me over, and give you to a rich man. But I've made up my mind to one thing, Alice. When I come back from this trip, I claim you openly no matter who objects. I'll have no more of this lurking round back doors and watching to see if the judge has gone to the office. I've saved enough money to buy a cottage, and if you are the girl I think, you'll come when I say, come."

An irrepressible smile curled the girl's lip as she listened to her lover's words, and she murmured:

"Oh, Ned, will that ever be? How happy I could be! I'd work and slave; I'd do *anything* for you. But oh, will it ever be?"

"Why not, Alice?" he answered. "I don't intend to be a fisherman all my life, I can assure you. Though I ought not to speak ill of the craft that took me up when ill-fortune overtook me. I thought once to live by my brains."

"And you are so talented, Ned," interrupted Alice, admiringly. "You ought to be a lawyer or a doctor or something, dear. I know you are only throwing yourself away in this rough life."

Ned smiled rather proudly as he answered:

"I can do anything I set out to do, Alice. They all said I was good for nothing; that

college men had no business in the world without fortune to back them; but I showed them I could work with my hands and make my brains help them. If this trip realizes well I've an offer to take command of the Flirt next time. Darke is a good fellow, if he is hard, and he tells me he has been watching me ever since I came on board as a green hand."

Alice seemed to be uneasy about something. "Do you like Samson Darke?" she asked him at last, after some hesitation.

Ned laughed; the open, frank laugh of a young man in good health, with good prospects.

"Why, of course I do. I admit he's a rough sort of customer, but he's been kind to me in his way. Don't you like him?"

Alice colored slightly and evaded the question by looking up at the sky, where the white clouds were chasing each other over the clear blue that indicated a northwest wind.

"You'll have a good run out," she said, "but it's going to be bitterly cold."

Ned smiled as he replied:

"We don't mind that. We're warmly clothed you know, and after all, the worst of the spring's over. Good-by, dearest, and don't forget that when I come back you're to be Mrs. Edward Norwood in spite of them all."

Alice started as if she had but just realized that he was just going away, and clung to him, sobbing:

"Oh! Ned, Ned, don't go, don't go! I've had such dreams about you! But I know you must. I'm foolish. You'll come back, won't you, dear?"

"Come back!" he echoed. "Ay, Alice, I'll come back in spite of sea and storm. Whatever else is certain in this world, be sure I will come back to claim my little wife."

Then there was a long, close embrace by that back-door at Gloucester, and the young fisherman strode away down the garden to a small lane at the rear that ran down to the port, and took his departure.

As for Alice, she stood watching him till his head disappeared over the palings, her eyes dim with tears.

It was by no means an unpleasant outlook from that door on the judge's garden, even in April, for the place faced the south, the sun shone warm and bright, and the grass was green wherever it was sheltered from the wind. One might see the harbor and the sea beyond, covered with tossing white-caps, with the fleet schooners spreading their broad wings to fly away, and dashing out to the open sea; while others still lay riding at their anchors, with the clouds of spray dashing over their bows as they plunged into the chopping waves.

It was a bright, exhilarating view which Alice had often seen before and delighted in; but on that morning she seemed to be gloomy and depressed, beyond the power of nature to rouse her.

She remained with her eyes fixed on the port, especially on one schooner that lay at anchor still, with her mainsail up, as if ready to get under way, and shivered as she heard the wind whistle over the chimneys of the houses, though all was warm and sunny in Judge Mason's garden.

"Ah," she murmured to herself, "how bright it looks now, but what will it be out at sea? Oh! Ned, Ned, if I had dared tell you—"

She stopped abruptly at the sound of a step close to the end of the garden, and saw a man's head above the low palings.

The man had a black "sou'-wester" on, and his face was big and bearded, while his huge shoulders, appearing above the paling, showed him to be a person of great height.

His eyes were fixed on Alice as if he had been watching her, and as he passed the gate he stopped and called out, in a deep, not unmusical voice:

"Ahoy, Miss Ally! well, we're off at last, and your father can sleep easy for awhile."

Alice flushed angrily, and retorted:

"I don't know what you mean, Captain Darke."

The big man put his hand on the latch of the gate and came in before he answered her.

He was a grand specimen of physical manhood, in his rough fishing dress, and his face was not by any means unattractive, but for a certain bold, fierce stare of his gray eyes and a scornful curl of his lip under the bushy brown beard.

"You don't know what I mean!" he repeated, a little contemptuously. "Yes, ye do, Alice Mason. I mean that he'll know Ned Norwood's at sea and not likely to be hanging around back doors. D'y'e think I don't keep my eyes skinned? What's the use of this glass?"

He indicated a big ship's glass that he had shoved into one of his side pockets as he went on:

"I saw it all, Alice Mason, and the parting was very affecting. I've nothing to say against it. Ned's a fair sailor for a greenhorn; but the time may come when you'll want a firmer hand and a stouter heart than he holds to keep you from harm, my girl. You threw me overboard for his fine ways once, and see what you got for it. He had to come down as low as me. I've got nothing to say against it. A gal's got a

right to change her mind like the wind, I suppose; but I do say this, Alice Mason—"

As he spoke his gray eyes flashed fire, and he ground his strong teeth under his bushy beard.

"Before I give you up for good there'll be a fight 'twixt him and me, and Samson Darke ain't reckoned a boy. Good-day to ye."

So saying, he strode off to the back gate and followed the same road as Norwood.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE FLASH.

THE Flash lay straining at her cable like a mettlesome steed tugging at the halter, when Captain Samson Darke made his appearance on the wharf, ready to go to sea.

The schooner was one of the finest of her class, the "Gloucester Trawlers," fine in the lines as the old Baltimore clippers which they have superseded, with hollow bow, clean tapering run, broad beam at the waist, and a main boom that was big enough for a vessel nearly twice her size.

She was rigged for fighting heavy seas, her decks were partitioned off into square pens about nine inches high, to keep the fish from sliding about as they were thrown aboard, and her cabin and forecastle below were fitted up in ash and black walnut, as neatly as many yachts.

In front of the foremast was coiled a pile of nine-inch Manilla hawser, four hundred fathoms in length, and six dories, sharp in the bow, flat-bottomed and narrow-sterned, were lashed, bottom up, on the deck pens, ready for use when they reached the Banks.

The captain came down to the shore and cast a seaman's look at the sky, then at the sea, as he walked down to the water's edge near the wharf, where Ned Norwood stood by the bow of a dory, holding the painter in his hand, ready to cast off.

The angry expression had vanished from the sailor's face, and his voice was hearty and apparently good-humored as he asked:

"Well, Ned, last aboard, as usual?"

Ned laughed as he answered:

"It's always manners to wait for the skipper, and I had a little business to attend to before I started. The boys are all aboard."

Darke gave him a quick, suspicious glance, as he got into the dory, saying:

"A sailor's business is to be aboard when the tide's at the full, my lad. Shove off and mind you don't scrape the paint, coming alongside. It takes a blank of a time to knock that into some of your college fellers."

Ned colored slightly as he shoved off and took the oars to row out to the Flash. He was more touchy on points of seamanship than he was willing to allow, because it was the only thing in which his companion did not admit him to an equality.

Norwood, as he had let drop in his conversation with Alice, had seen better days. He had been the son of a well-to-do Gloucester man who had gone to Boston to make a fortune, and had destined his son for the light of a learned profession.

Ned had been to Harvard College, and was near his graduation, with honors, when his father suddenly failed, and, in his morbid despair at his ruin, took morphine and was found dead in his bed at a Boston hotel.

To the young man the failure and death came as news on the same day, when he was studying a speech for the valedictory of his class, which he had been chosen to deliver, and they dashed all his brilliant prospects at once.

It was then that Ned Norwood showed, for the first time in his life, of what stuff he was made, inheriting much of the character of his dead mother, whose loss, four years before, had very seriously affected him.

Instead of yielding to the shock, he surprised every one by passing a brilliant examination and pronouncing the finest valedictory that had been heard in Harvard for many a year.

Then he resolutely turned his back on all the offers of assistance he received from relatives, and went to the place of his birth, the fishing port of Gloucester, where he had spent his summer vacations from childhood, and whence he had sailed, for fun, on many a fishing voyage, and set to work to earn his living by his hands as a sailor.

While at college, with the prospect of a good and early competency, he had fallen in love with Alice Mason, daughter of Judge Mason an old lawyer of the town into whose office he was to have entered.

The judge had smiled on the lovers and consented to their engagement, and they were to have been married when Edward was admitted to practice.

But the change in the young man's bright prospects produced a corresponding change in the worldly-wise judge.

He was not cruel to Edward. He even offered to take him in his office at once at a low salary as a copying clerk; but when the young man refused and told him he was going to earn his living as a fisherman, the old judge observed in the dryest of tones:

"Very well, as you please. If you prefer to associate with the vulgar herd, make your bed

and lie on it. But I don't receive foremast hands in my house. You can consider your engagement at an end. Good-day!"

And from that day, for two years, the judge had turned his head whenever he saw Ned coming, and had taken Alice to Boston, every winter, to keep her away from the young man.

But the old story of Love and the Locksmith had been forgotten by Judge Mason, who was a good lawyer, but a poor judge of women.

Every one spoke well of Norwood's courage and success in his new profession, and every one aided and abetted the lovers to meet at little social gatherings, when the judge was away on business.

Ned Norwood, fisherman before the mast, had kept some of his fashionable clothes of college days, and was a welcome guest in many a house, where the judge never thought he entered. The only other man who followed the sea and went to the same houses was Captain Samson Darke, who owned several fine schooners, and divided his time between sea and shore, as pleased him.

Darke was reputed to be worth a hundred thousand dollars, and Judge Mason openly encouraged his visits, when he frowned on Ned Norwood, but Darke kept to the sea in a way that made people say he did it for the love of the thing, so they voted him an oddity and invited him to their houses, with all his rough ways and occasional lapses of speech.

Now he sat in the stern of the dory and gave his orders to Ned, in the rough, fault-finding style he affected with the young man at sea.

"Look out what you're doing. Don't try to pull broadside to the sea. I can pull a boat in the heaviest weather, and not ship half as much water as you're doing now. Lay out, man. You pull as if you were afraid of the oars. Steady now. You can't come up to the weather gangway. Haven't you learned that yet? That's a little better. I may make a sailor of you some day if you try hard enough. Now then, do you want to go overboard or knock all the paint off the Flash? Heave a line, Landry! That's it. Now hold on to her, Ned, and look out you don't duck me."

He climbed aboard, scolding and sneering all the time, and Ned Norwood let the dory drop astern to be hooked onto the davits.

When he at last reached the deck he found the crew of the Flash at work, casting loose the foresail and jib, and manning the windlass to heave up the anchor.

There were quite a crowd of them, for fishing schooners carry comparatively large crews to man the dories and set the trawls, when a much smaller complement is enough to work the vessel.

The Flash had a crew of which her captain often boasted as the best in Gloucester, and as having come from the ends or the earth to man the pride of the trawling fleet.

There were no less than four pairs of brothers of different nationalities: Mike and Jim Clancy, whose accent marked them from the Green Isle; Baptiste and Marie Landry, French Canadians; Malcolm and Murdock McCloud, from the Hebrides; and Chresten and Hannes Olsen, Norwegians; with Gamaliel Perry, Gloucester born, for three generations. Besides these, there were two more Irishmen, Dan Murphy, the mate, and Terry Ryan, the cook, who was the most important person aboard in his way, and was always dubbed "the Doctor," in fishing parlance.

Captain Darke cast a look over the vessel, and smiled as one well pleased, for the Flash was a boat to be proud of.

"Haul taut the main throat halyards," he cried in his fault-finding way. "Give the peak a good pull, you lubbers. D'ye want to go to sea with one of the Doctor's pudding-bags for a mainsail? Heave away at that windlass there. You, Norwood, are you going to sleep over the jib? Bend your back, man, and let her come up. This is no place for sleepy-heads. Hoist away on that foresail. Lively now! Hoist away all. Heave away at that windlass there! One would think you were all in church, afraid to disturb the congregation. There she comes. You, Norwood, get to that jib sheet. Do you want to have the schooner in irons? That forepeak's sagging like my grandmother's clothes-line. Give her a good pull, you Clancys, both of ye! Spring to it, boys. Now she goes. Get that anchor catted, you, Ned Norwood. Time you waked up."

The anchor left the sandy bottom with a jerk, and the Flash fell off as Ned Norwood held the clew of the jib well over to starboard, while the men at the windlass worked like madmen, the schooner's head swept round, and the foresail filled with a bang as Mike Clancy checked it with the sheet, while Darke put the wheel up, and yelled:

"Stand by the main-sheet, you Landrys. Do you want to spring the boom before we get under way?"

Then all the sails filled together, and the Flash heeled over under the cold blast of the northwester, as she pointed her long, delicate nose seaward, and began to rush through the water like a sword-fish.

Darke stood by the helm, his gigantic figure towering over everybody on deck, and watched

his men with well-pleased glances, for they were working in the style he liked to see.

He was an energetic man, full of vitality, good and bad, intense in his likes and dislikes as the old Norse viking he resembled, and the keenest pleasure of his life was that of going out to sea with a tearing northwester on his port quarter.

The schooner went bowling along like a race-horse under three whole sails, but Darke was not satisfied till he had put on all the jibs and both gaff topsails, with the lee rail of the schooner almost into the water, which washed in at the scupper-holes all along the starboard side as the Flash headed away for the Grand Bank. The sea outside was short and choppy, the stiff gale blowing the spray in clouds over the little schooner as she dashed through it, while the white sails of fifty or more vessels of different rigs dotted the sea in all directions, some steering the same course as the Flash, others heading for the coast of Maine for lumber, or south and west toward the ports of the different States.

The Flash was a lively boat, as they called her, and had in her time given tough races to more than one fancy yacht, while as a sea-boat in heavy weather, she would go where not one yacht in a hundred dared go.

The blue line of the distant coast of Marblehead was becoming fainter momentarily, and the white houses of Gloucester had faded into the same misty azure, when they heard the shrill whistle of the "Doctor" below, and Norwood came aft and said to the captain:

"Dinner's ready, skipper, and I'll take her along, while you get your grub."

Darke relinquished the spokes with a singular look in his eyes that Norwood didn't understand till long afterward, as he said:

"You're very kind to look after my comfort. I suppose you think I'd do the same for you."

Norwood stared as if surprised, as he took the wheel, but he only answered:

"I don't suppose any such thing, sir. You're the skipper, I'm only a foremast hand. I don't suppose it's my duty to go below, and leave you fasting at the wheel."

Darke stuck his hands into the pockets of his big pea-jacket and glanced round before he answered. Part of the crew had already gone below to dinner, the other half were on deck; for the forecastle would not hold all at one time so they had divided into gangs.

"You're very considerate of your duty to me on board the schooner," said Darke slowly, "but you're not so nice ashore, my lad. D'ye know that, Ned Norwood?"

As he spoke, he turned his fierce gray eyes on Norwood, who for the first time saw that the captain looked pale and savage.

In his momentary inattention to the post he had assumed, and fascinated by the glare of the captain's fierce eyes, Norwood lost sight of the vane at the mast-head, and the schooner's bows came sweeping up into the wind, when, without a moment's warning, the big man fetched him a tremendous blow with his open hand on the side of the head, growling:

"Keep her off, ye white-handed college lubber! D'ye know no better than that?"

It was the first time Darke had given him a blow or a harsh word; for he generally did his rebuking in the form of good-natured banter. Edward Norwood staggered under the shock, but held on to the wheel, while Darke put his hands back in his pockets with a sneer, and sauntered away to the companion-hatch, going down-stairs without another word.

As for Norwood, he kept his place at the wheel, feeling sick and dizzy from the blow for several moments, while his heart swelled with indignation and shame.

Blows are so rare in the fishing-fleet, where a democratic equality of interest binds together crew and captain, that such a blow as he had just received was all the more galling.

True, he was before the mast, and Darke was the captain; true, he had let the schooner luff for a moment through inattention to his work; but the captain himself had distracted his attention, and he was the last man in the world who should have struck him. So at least Edward thought.

Had he been in any other position, the blow would have been less brutal and dastardly. He could not let go the wheel without serious danger to all the crew and Darke knew it, and had struck him without provocation, before half the company of the Flash.

He kept his hold however and steered on, not pretending to notice anything but his duty, his lips firmly compressed, his teeth clinched, his whole frame rigid with anger. The men on deck glanced at him furtively as if they were astonished at the captain's sudden exhibition of violence, but said nothing to him, nor he to them, till the first gang came on deck again.

CHAPTER III.

THE MIDNIGHT WATCH.

It was Mike Clancy who came to relieve Ned at the wheel, saying:

"The Doctor's grub's iligant, Professor, and it's not long we'll be havin' fresh mate. Take it while it's hot. What's the coarse?"

"East by south," answered Norwood shortly, as he relinquished the wheel and went forward.

Mike noticed his gloomy face and called after him:

"What the devil's the matter with ye, Ned? Has yer girl gone back on ye, or are ye goin' to be say-sick?"

"Neither," was the unexpected interruption of the skipper himself, who came rolling aft, smoking his pipe, "the Professor was star-gazing and I had to bring him to his bearings, that's all, Mike. He'll make a sailor when he's had a few more lickings to get him in shape."

For a moment Ned Norwood was tempted to reply, but he knew the terrible power possessed by the master even of a fishing-schooner, if he chose to exercise it, and after the sudden specimen of Darke's arbitrary temper should be irritated, the young man thought it prudent to go below in silence to his dinner.

Usually he had a good healthy appetite, and the "Doctor's" steaks were good, but Ned Norwood ate but little that day, and seemed to carry the mark of the blow he had received in a crimson brand on his cheek.

In fact the captain's heavy hand had marked him, and one of his mates below—Baptiste Landry—innocently asked:

"Vat for de skeeper he strike you, Professeur? By gar it make von print of all de fingaire in red. *C'était une lachete.*"

"Never mind," said Norwood gloomily, "the trip won't take long, and I'll give him no chance to strike me again. It serves me right, I suppose, but I didn't expect it of him."

In fact, up to that day he and Darke had been the best of friends at sea, while on shore they had met at houses where the social superiority of the younger man had been freely conceded by Darke, who had shown no jealousy.

They got through dinner and lighted their pipes, even Norwood smoking furiously to dull the excitement under which he was laboring from brooding over the blow he had received, and then came a hoarse shout down the hatchway from Murphy the mate.

"All hands lay aft to thumb the hat."

"Thumbing the hat" is a method of choosing watches by lot, in vogue among the fishing-vessels, and the second dinner gang went aft to obey the order, while the "Doctor," or cook, left his dishes and proceeded to the wheel, as a man who was free from watch duty.

The crew of the Flash, ten in number, took hold of a hat, standing in a circle with their thumbs on the rim of the inverted head-piece, and Captain Darke turned his back, saying:

"Six is the number, boys. Ready."

Then he reached out his hand backward, and placed his forefinger on one of the thumbs at random.

"Whose is it?" he asked.

"Mine, sur," responded Mike Clancy.

The captain turned round and counted six of the broad, horny thumbs till he came to the Norwegian, Chresten Olsen.

"My watch," he said; then counted six more, till he came to Baptiste Landry.

"Larboard watch," he said.

Then he counted again, till he had assigned to each his watch, and ended with the words:

"Mind whom you call."

The crew of the Flash was divided into two watches. The captain had the two Norwegians, Mike Clancy, Marie Landry, Murdock McCloud and Edward Norwood.

Murphy had the rest.

It was not till then that Jim Clancy suddenly turned pale, and burst out:

"Holy smoke, skipper, d'ye mind it now—we've a Jonah on board!"

"A Jonah?" echoed Darke uneasily, while all the hardy fishermen looked at each other and seemed to be frightened. "What do you mean? Where's the Jonah?"

Jim turned round as if uncertain, and began to count inaudibly to himself, till he said at last in an accent of resignation;

"Captain, darlin', we'll have no luck this trip or me name's not Jim Clancy. There's just thirteen aboard the craft, and one of us will never see Gloucester again, sure as eggs is eggs. D'ye mind that now?"

Baptiste Landry burst into a groan.

"Eh, mon Dieu! and to-day is Vendredi—it is Friday, by gar! Ve catch no feesh dis trip, so sure, so sure."

Darke burst into a harsh laugh.

"Ye superstitious idiots," he said. "don't ye know the Flash was launched a Friday and she's had more luck than any boat in the fleet, Thirteen! Who cares for luck? Good sailors beat luck and make it serve them. Jonah! Yes, maybe we have a Jonah aboard; but if we have 'tis but to do as the fellows in the good book did with their Jonah. Larboard watch, get to your quarters. No more talk about Jonahs. Norwood, take the wheel and let the Doctor go below. And look out you steer steady, or I'll make you see more stars than you ever gazed at in the judge's back garden, sneaking round after dark."

The young man flushed deeply and then turned

ed white; but controlled himself with a strong effort and took the wheel, while the Flash darted forward on her course like a race-horse, and the wind freshening every moment as they got further to sea, made the topmasts bend like whips and caused more than one uneasy glance aloft. The mate's watch went below, silent and sullen, to tell all sorts of superstitious stories about the Jonahs they had known in past days, and to point to the innumerable instances in which the unlucky person had brought disaster on the ship in which he sailed.

They were angered by the captain's open scorn of the superstition they all believed in devoutly, and began to discuss his singular harshness, so suddenly shown to Edward Norwood, who was a favorite with all.

"'Tis a mane shame to strike a good man like that," observed Jim Clancy to Baptiste Landry. "I saw it meself and be jibbers, av we wer'n't near blue water, I'd be strikin' work so I would and let him work the Flash alone."

"Hoot, mon," Malcolm McCloud retorted, "'tis nae concern of ours. If the skipper hits ye on the lug once yersel maybe ye'd think so. I mind me this Norwood's a dainty lad that pits gloves on his paws to keep 'em white, and it's time the skipper took it out of him."

Baptiste shook his head.

"By gar dat not eet."

"And what is it then?" asked Jim.

"It is une femme—a woman. I see. You will find out. I know, I know. De French is de people dat know, by gar."

Malcolm McCloud puffed at his pipe but made no answer: the subject was becoming too deep for a sailor when women were brought in as factors, and the conversation was dropped.

Meantime the Flash held on her course to the eastward, and the day wore on, the wind still keeping from the same quarter and blowing so hard that Darke had to take in his topsails and flying jib to avoid carrying away his light spars.

As for Norwood he continued at the wheel and attended to his business so well that Darke found no further excuse for striking him, though he continued to pace the deck near the young man in a surly manner so unlike his usual air that the men on deck noticed and muttered to each other about what could be the matter with the skipper and what had set him against "the Professor."

Norwood, from having let drop the fact of his having been at college had been dubbed the "Professor," and was regarded as a prodigy of learning from the fact that he knew how to work a quadrant and chronometer.

When his trick at the wheel was over he went below to turn in and was allowed to sleep till midnight when his turn came again and he went on deck with Murdock McCloud, to find the moon high in the sky the wind sunk to a fair breeze, the Flash gliding along over large smooth swells with every stitch of canvas set and drawing, while up in the northern sky a magnificent aurora was sending rosy streamers shooting to the zenith such as he had never seen before.

McCloud took the wheel and Norwood went forward to the bow on the lookout. The cold of the weather had moderated considerably and the beauty of the sea in the moonlight was increased by the phosphorescence of the water. He and McCloud were alone, for the whole watch was not called on deck, two men being ample to run a schooner unless sail has to be spread or reduced.

He had almost forgiven the blow he had received in the morning, and began to ascribe it to some infirmity of temper in the captain, when as he was gazing dreamily out at the bow, forgetting everything as he leaned against the coils of the huge cable, he heard a stealthy step on the other side of the foremast, and looked round to encounter the face of Darke himself, the gray eyes glaring at him with a singular expression of half menace, half scorn, as the captain said in a low tone:

"Well, Ned Norwood, we're alone now. Did ye understand what I said to ye, to-day?"

"On my honor, no," answered Norwood in a tone of earnest expostulation. "I was utterly astounded by it, Captain Darke. You had been the kindest of captains to me, up to the moment you struck me without cause—"

Darke's lip curled in a sneer.

"Without cause, ye lubber! D'ye call bad steering no cause?"

"Well, I admit that," said Ned hurriedly, "but you know as well as I do, that I was startled by your tone and forgot myself for a single instant. Surely a word would have been all-sufficient, from you, without a blow you would not have dared give on shore."

He had become angry again at the memory, and spoke warmly, when Darke, just as suddenly as before, and without more warning, dealt him a blow on the side of the head with his clinched fist that stretched Norwood on the deck, the captain growling in suppressed tones:

"Not dared, eh? I'll show you whether I dare or not, ye white-handed lubber."

The blow was a severe one, and Ned lay sick and dizzy for a moment.

"Get up, ye lazy hound," growled Darke

with a kick. "Get up, if ye don't want to be thrown out for a Jonah."

Ned rose up slowly and resumed his post, having made up his mind to say no more. He thought the captain's mind was wandering, and to with dispute such a man was to invite his own destruction.

Darke laughed in a low sneering way.

"Ye think I daren't strike ye when I will," he said sardonically. "Maybe ye think that ye could handle Samson Darke ashore. I've heard the boys tell how ye were what they call a boxer, and perhaps ye think ye can box me, ye college-bred lubber. I'll give ye leave to try now, and hold ye harmless for mutiny."

Norwood looked up at the giant, and his eyes flashed as he answered:

"You know I can't do it. You're captain and I'm a foremast hand. You can do as you please. I can't strike back, *here*."

"Here," echoed the captain mockingly. "But ye will, when we get to Gloucester again, perhaps! *How d'ye know ye'll see Gloucester again?*"

Norwood gave an imperceptible start as the other spoke, and turned his head to look in Darke's face. It was pale as ashes, and the captain's eyes glittered like those of an evil demon.

The young man was supple and vigorous in frame, though not within fifty pounds of the giant captain, and he was courageous to rashness, but for a moment he quailed before Darke, and the older seaman laughed.

"Aha," he growled, "ye blench, do ye? And you're the boy that thinks to cross my path and live, are ye?"

"Cross your path?" echoed Ned, his momentary tremor vanishing in surprise. "How have I ever crossed your path, captain?"

Darke laughed.

"Ye don't know, don't ye? Where are ye to go on the next trip in June?"

Norwood looked at the other amazedly. A new light was breaking in on him. Darke was jealous of him, having learned that he had been offered the command of the new schooner Flirt.

"I don't know," he answered hesitatingly. "I've been offered a schooner, captain; but I don't know if I've experience enough to warrant me in taking the responsibility. But in any event, I would not think of interfering with you in any way."

Darke laughed again in the same bitter, mocking way he had shown all along.

"Interfere with me!" he said; "ye boy, ye child, ye beardless baby, d'ye think a thing like you could interfere with Samson Darke?"

"The sea's wide enough for all," said Ned, more firmly. "I've a right to engage in business as well as any one else, haven't I?"

Darke eyed him in the same surly way as before as he answered:

"Ye have, I suppose."

"Then what have I done to you, captain," asked Ned, "to anger you so? Have I failed in my duty in any way?"

"I don't intend ye shall," was the ungracious retort. "I'll make the Flash a hell on earth to ye if ye try any tricks on me, Ned Norwood. Mark that. I've got ye in my watch, and I'll make ye rue the day ye ever crossed my path."

"But at least tell me," expostulated Ned, "in what way I have crossed your path. I am not conscious of it. Have I offended you on shore?"

"Ye have," was the gruff reply.

Ned revolved in his mind all he could think of. He had last met Darke in a mixed company, when the latter had been unusually silent and grumpy all the evening, while Ned had enjoyed the happiness of having Alice with him, almost undisturbed.

But he had never connected Alice with Darke, though whispers had reached him that Judge Mason would like to have the great boat owner for a son-in-law.

Darke was so little of a lady's man and Alice so rarely met him that Norwood failed to realize the truth as he asked:

"What have I done?"

Darke came close to him, and looked as if he were about to strike him, as he growled:

"Ye've hung round back doors too long, Ned. I'm going to marry Alice Mason. D'ye hear? Her father's promised I shall, and you've got to get out of that. D'ye understand?"

Ned started back, exclaiming:

"Great Heavens, is it possible? You? I never dreamed of it—"

Darke interrupted harshly:

"Ye didn't, didn't ye? Ye know it now. In a word, will ye give her up or no?"

He looked so threatening that Norwood saw he was about to strike, and the young man sprung back behind the coils of the cable, saying, in a tone of expostulation:

"Darke, Darke, consider; this is not fair, not manly, big as you are, and captain, to take advantage of me like this."

His words seemed to recall a glimmer of reason to the captain, who remained where he was, and growled out:

"I'm captain of this boat. D'ye promise or not? If ye don't, I'll make the Flash too hot to hold ye."

Norwood hesitated.

"Darke, hear reason," he protested; "this is not seaman's duty. I cannot give her up; I cannot. It's impossible. I cannot tell you why, but it's impossible."

"Why?" asked Darke, in the same lowering way. "Answer quick, for your life depends on it."

"My life!" echoed Norwood; "why, surely you would not murder a man that's done you no harm? It cannot be hidden. It is impossible—"

Darke laughed in a low, sneering tone.

"It cannot, eh? We'll see about that. So ye refuse, do ye?"

"I do."

"Why? Ye'd better tell me. I warn ye."

Norwood looked round in desperation, for he saw that the captain's hand was upon a heavy locust belaying-pin, as deadly as a policeman's club, and he knew he had no chance to fight back without mutiny. Murdock McCloud was still at the wheel, and no one else on deck, as Darke repeated:

"Why do ye refuse?"

"Because we're married already," said Edward, stung to desperation by the persecution.

"Now, Samson Darke, do your worst. Kill me if you dare, and, as sure as there's a God in heaven, you'll swing for it. I defy you!"

Samson Darke looked at him from head to foot, his hand clutching the belaying-pin; but Norwood never quailed. Then the giant captain nodded his head slowly.

"Married, are ye? Hum!" was all he said, and with that he walked aft and disappeared into his cabin without another word.

CHAPTER IV.

LOST IN THE MIST.

NED NORWOOD was disturbed no more on his watch, though the strange behavior of the captain made him so nervous that he kept glancing back over his shoulder half the time, expecting to see that gigantic figure behind the coils of the cable with weapon upraised to strike.

The schooner sailed on, and as it went the swell grew longer and smoother, with a certain oily gloss upon it that indicated the neighborhood of ice.

Norwood found it getting colder, while the breeze fell, and began to stamp about the deck to keep warm, looking out over the bow, till, on a sudden, something glittered in the moonlight ahead of him, and he caught the glint of ice, down on the horizon.

He went aft instantly to report, and found the lantern burning in the cabin, but the captain lay in his bunk, apparently asleep.

Ned went to him and touched his arm.

"Ice ahead, sir," he said quietly.

Darke opened his eyes and looked at him with the strange stare he had shown all along.

"Ice ahead—hum! How far?"

"A few miles, I think, sir. It's almost time to call the larboard watch."

"Call 'em then," said Darke.

Then, in a musing tone, as if recalling something to his memory, he added:

"So you're married? Hum! Married! Hum!"

Ned Norwood made no reply, but went to call the watch; and in half an hour after was down in his bunk, dreaming of Alice. He had no fear the captain would assault him in the midst of the crew.

When he waked up next morning at the summons to go on deck, the motion of the schooner told him that the wind had changed, before he put his head above the hatches; for the Flash was pitching and rolling violently.

As soon as he got on deck he saw that the sky was covered with gray clouds, in regular lines, with dull whitish edges; that a thick mist was driving down from windward, and that the sea had assumed the black, speckled appearance peculiar to storm waves, streaked with foam and crowned with angry crests.

The Flash was stripped to jib and mainsail, both close-reefed, and every now and then the steersman had to keep her off, when a wave of more than common height threatened to break over the little vessel.

Captain Darke, his huge sea-boots spread wide apart, his hands in his pockets, stood near the wheel watching the weather, while the crew were staggering to and fro about different duties, and Mate Murphy was heaving the log.

As he ordered the line hauled in, he said to Darke:

"Bedad, captain, we've come two hundred and fifteen miles, and not a sail in sight. We've missed the Banks, I'm thinkin'."

"Heave the lead," responded Darke, briefly. "I know where we are, if you don't."

The deep-sea lead went flying from the bows, and Jim Clancy reported seventy-five fathoms.

"Let me see the lead," said the captain.

Darke glanced at the tallow-armed bottom, all covered with dark mud and sand, then glanced round at the prospect.

The mist was closing in on them, the sea was running masthead-high, and it was evident that a storm was coming down.

"Let go the anchor," he said. "We'll try here with the hand-lines till we can set the trawls. All hands on deck. Get to work."

Half a dozen men rushed to the anchor, which went down into the depths of the ocean, and the huge pile of Manilla cable began to diminish rapidly as the line ran out.

On, on ran the cable, which seemed as if it were never going to stop, till Baptiste Landry sung out to the quarter-deck:

"She take, capitaine; she take abolt."

"Pay out till I tell you to stop," was the only reply. "Let go the jib, there. Let her swing. Pay out two hundred and twenty fathoms, boys. We'll need it all."

It seemed a risky undertaking for a little schooner like the Flash to cast anchor in the open sea in the midst of such a storm as every one knew must be coming on, but such are the ordinary perils of a Grand Banker's life, where vessels ride out severe storms entirely unsheltered.

The crew paid out more than half the cable—it was four hundred fathoms in length—and bound around it the protecting "strads"—pieces of old rope fastened to the cable to keep it from chafing in the hawse pipe—and then out came the frozen herring for bait, and over the side of the Flash went the hand-lines, going down into seventy-five fathoms in search of fish.

And hardly were they down when Jim Clancy yelled excitedly:

"Be jabers we sthruke 'im that time, boys. A hundred-pounder, a two—a three—bedad, he weighs a ton. Mike, Mike, for the love of the saints give us a hand, or the devil will have me overboard."

Baptiste, on the other side, roared:

"Halibut, by gar! Oh, *mon Dieu*, how he pool!"

And then all the lines were kept hard at work, the men running to help each other at intervals, and swinging in the huge fishes, which ran all the way from a hundred to a hundred and fifty or two hundred pounds, so that it took two or three men with gaff-hooks to get them aboard and slat them down into the deck pens, as fast as they could pull them in.

"Who said there was no luck this trip?" cried the big captain, exultingly. "There's a hundred dollars aboard already, and more to come."

Murdock McCloud looked up at the sea as he shook the hook out of the mouth of a huge halibut, and muttered:

"The trip's no over yet, skeeper."

They were still in the first excitement of having chanced on such a feeding-ground, when the schooner gave a tremendous lurch, and a great sea came dashing in over the bows, sweeping the decks in a great, grim wall, carrying one of the men bodily up against the foot of the main-mast, and making the Flash quiver like a reed in the wind.

At the same minute down came the black curtain of mist and the tempest began to howl through the rigging of the little vessel, while the crew hastily hauled in the hand-lines and prepared to make the vessel "snug" for the storm that was on them.

They hauled down the mainsail and set in its place a little triangular rag called the "riding sail," that just sufficed to keep the schooner head to the waves, while they hastily cut open and cleaned the fish they had taken, watching their chance to throw them down into the ice-pens in the hold.

Not once did it seem to suggest itself to a soul aboard the Flash to cut the cable and run for shelter. They had all ridden out worse gales than this promised to be, before that, and, had the course been suggested, Darke would have answered:

"What! leave a ground like this for a few seas? Not while halibut's worth what it fetches on the wharf."

It was rough, rapid work getting the fish ready, of which they already had near two thousand pounds, caught in less than ten minutes; but the work was over at last; the dressed fish thrown into the ice-pens in the hold, the hatch shut down, and all the crew dived below except the anchor-watch lookout, whose duty was to call all hands in case of danger.

And the lookout that day was Ned Norwood, all alone in a storm of snow and sleet in the midst of a howling waste of black seas, with the mist so thick round him that nothing could be seen but the tops of the waves, and the sleet so blinding one could only catch a glimpse to windward by snatches.

However, the lookout duty on the Banks is most important, and the safety of everybody on board depended on Ned's eyesight. He knew that they were on a part of the Bank rarely frequented by fishing vessels, but nearly in the track of the ocean steamers and he remembered also the ice that he had seen the night before when he went off watch.

What had become of that ice?

For all he knew in the darkness and mist, it might be only a few billows away, and if it came on them, Heaven help the schooner!

How long he staid at his post there in the dark afternoon that settled down on them he could not tell, for they don't count time rigidly on the Banks; but he thought it must be near sunset when the sea began to go down, with a rapidity that amazed him, while the wind fell

with equal suddenness, subsiding in less than half an hour, while a dense fog rose.

He went to the companionway, and called down:

"Captain, I think there's ice near."

"Why do you think so?" queried Darke, with a sneer. "What do you know about ice?"

"The sea's gone down, sir, and we're under the lee of something. The water begins to look oily, and I'm afraid we'll be caught," returned Ned, as calmly as he could.

"All hands on deck," cried Darke to the men in the forecastle. "We've time to get in a few fish, I reckon, before night."

The eager fishermen rushed up, and began to throw their lines again, till the captain gave the order:

"Haul in those side-lines. Get out the dories, and set the trawls. We can't fool away our time on hand-fishing."

"Get out the dories! Heave in your trawl tubs, and bait trawls," was the next order, and very soon the deck of the Flash presented a busy scene, as the men were busy at work on the long lines, set with shorter lines and hooks at intervals of every two fathoms, that go by the name of "trawls," on the Banks. These trawls, with one or two hundred hooks on each, are coiled away in tubs, and furnished, at each end, with an anchor and buoy line, by which they are set along the bottom of the sea where the fish feed.

It was rapid work for the fishermen in gangs to bait trawl after trawl, and as fast as each was baited and coiled away in its tub, it was hoisted into a dory, and two men rowed off to set it.

The sea, as Ned Norwood had noticed, had gone down entirely into a smooth, oily swell, and the density of the fog showed that the wind had completely vanished.

Such squalls, ending in fog, are not uncommon on the Banks, but in such cases the sea seldom goes down so suddenly, and the anchored trawlers sometimes nearly roll their masts out.

Ned Norwood was the first to have the schooner in his dory, along with Mike Clancy, who was his mate, and they pulled steadily away into the fog, guided by the sound of the schooner's bell, kept tolling by the "Doctor," till Mike said:

"Avast, rowin' honey. Bedad, it's meself that don't like the looks of things here. Let's set the trawl, and find the schooner av we can."

They ceased rowing, and hove over the end of the trawl, with its anchor and eighty fathoms of line, at the end of which they set afloat a buoy, with a red flag to mark the spot.

Then they paid out the rest of the trawl and rowed to the end of the other buoy-line, and when it was all overboard, Mike said soberly:

"Bedad, it's all very nice, Misther Professor. We've set the trawl, but devil a bell do I hear, and how are we goin' to find the schooner?"

He stood up and began gaping round in the white fog which covered everything with its mantle of oblivion, over which a dark shadow was beginning to creep as the night came on.

Then he began to look scared.

"Bedad, I'm lost," he muttered. "Holy mother o' Moses, which is north, anyway?"

Ned Norwood saw the look on his face, and could not help a singular feeling of fear from rising in his heart.

As Mike had said, there was nothing to indicate in any manner the points of the compass or the direction of the Flash. Only one uniform veil of white mist covered everything, only one intense silence pervaded the sea, which was smooth as a mill-pond. The bell no longer tinkled.

The bow and stern of the dory rose and fell with a gentle motion not more than a few inches at a time, showing that some swell still existed, but there was not even the lipping of a wavelet to disturb the silence by sounding on the bottom of the boat.

"Sit down, Mike," he said quietly. "If we get frightened we're lost for good. Let me think a little. Which way did we head from the schooner when we left her?"

Mike looked puzzled.

"Sorra one o' me knows even which way she was heading."

Then he uttered a low groan.

"Holy Mother purtec us! Maybe it's a tin days' fog."

Ned lifted his hand.

"Don't be frightened I tell you. We've got to keep our heads clear, or we're lost indeed. Where's the buoy flag? That will guide us."

Mike looked eagerly over the side of the dory and uttered an exclamation of great thankfulness as he ejaculated:

"Ye've more sinse than a twenty years' trawler, Professor, so ye have. Yonder 'tis."

Ned looked over the water and saw the red flag, like a little tuft of grass, almost vanished in the fog.

"Take the oars," he said quietly. "I'll watch it while you row. If we miss that, we've nothing to start from."

Mike dropped into his seat and began to row, but it seemed as if he were rowing against some strong current for the little red blotch remained

as indistinct as ever in the fast-gathering darkness, and when they finally got up to it and Ned placed his hand on the stick, Clancy observed:

"Holy smoke! the tide's runnin' like a mill-race, Professor."

"So much the better for us," replied Ned in a cheerful tone. "I've been thinking things over, Mike. Which gangway did we go over?"

"Starboard," said Mike without a moment's hesitation. "Don't ye remember, Professor, how me brother Jim was baitin' a trawl an' near stuck a hook into me leg? He was sittin' on the starboard rail, forinst the main riggin'."

"Very good," answered Ned. "Then we pulled straight away across this tide, for the Flash must have been riding with her head to it, and it must have carried us down some way astern, before we set the trawl."

"You're right," assented Mike, "but which way's the schooner, thin?"

"Listen. We are off on the starboard quarter of the Flash, not more than half a mile off, probably."

"But which way is she?" asked Mike in a tone of irritation. "What the devil do I care, if we don't know where the starboard quarter is, Professor?"

Ned rapped on the gunwale of the boat.

"How am I to tell you, if you won't listen. It's as easy as A, B, C."

"'Asy as A, B, C. Thin it's no wonder I don't know; for sorra letter c'u'd I iver larn."

Ned could not resist a smile.

"Well, as easy as boxing the compass then. I'll show you in a minute. Here's the trawl-buoy with the flag."

"Any fool can see that," responded Mike.

"You didn't, till I told you," retorted Ned a little warmly. "Well, if this tide hasn't changed since we rowed out, we're lying the same way as the schooner, for we're swinging on the trawl-line, just as if we were anchored. We're on the starboard quarter of the Flash, and she must be on our port bow. Now do you understand, Mr. Clancy?"

He pointed out into the fog as he spoke, and Mike ejaculated:

"Holy Mother o' Moses! av coarse she is. Bedad, I was near sayin' it meself. Ye wouldn't have found it, if it hadn't been for me."

Ned was about to answer when they heard the faint muffled tinkle of a bell in the very direction which he pointed and almost immediately after came another and deeper toned bell, in exactly the opposite direction. Mike jumped up excitedly.

"'Tis a vessel in the fog, and she's big," he cried. "Hark, d'ye hear nothing?"

Both men sat down and listened intently. A faint muffled sound came booming over the water with uncertain direction, and Mike whispered excitedly:

"'Tis a steamer coming. Holy Mother! she'll run us down, sure."

The booming sound went on till it became clearly recognizable as the churning of a large screw-propeller in the water, but the darkness became at the same time more and more complete, till Mike whispered:

"We're in for it, be jabers! We'll have to stay out all night, Professor."

"I think so," replied Ned quietly. "Bend the end of the painter round the trawl-line, Mike. We'll have to lie here till morning."

Mike obeyed, and they fastened the end of the boat's painter to the line under the buoy, the ominous trembling and churning of the steamer coming closer every moment; the darkness so thick that it could almost be felt; the cold, clammy fog wrapping up the boat like a wet blanket.

It was an embarrassing strait to be in, but not as yet anything more. Dories are often lost in fogs on the Banks; but the special Providence that seems to watch over sailors generally brings them into company of other vessels before it is too late.

The regular pulsing of the coming steamer could not be exactly located, but it soon became evident that the course of the ship would not take it over them, so they were spared that additional peril.

For a while it grew louder and louder, and they heard the deep notes of the bell in the fog, accompanied by the hoarse boom of a steam whistle in long blasts, while the sound of the steam showed that the strange vessel was going at low speed. Then it grew fainter again and Mike said:

"She's passed us, Professor. We won't be sunk."

They heard soon after the faint tinkle of the Flash's bell, as they supposed, and the steamer gave several blasts and stopped her engines.

"Bedad, he'll run over the skipper av he don't look out," ejaculated Mike.

Then came a great tinkling and tolling, with several other blasts, and they heard the steamer go off, after which the silence of death settled down over the sea, and even the Flash ceased to toll her bell.

"Make yourself comfortable for the night," said Ned Norwood, calmly. "We'll be better for a sleep, as we've nothing to eat. I'll keep watch for a while."

Mike stretched himself philosophically in the bow of the dory, and wrapped his heavy peajacket round him.

"Bedad, you're right, Professor," he observed. "A nap's next to a male to a hungry man; but me insides is growlin', like they was a litter of puppies, be jabers."

Nevertheless, in five minutes afterward, the regular snores of the son of Erin announced that he had forgotten his hunger, and Ned set himself down in the dory's stern-sheets to think over the situation, till, insensibly, he also succumbed to fatigue, and fell into a disturbed and dreamy doze.

How long he had slept he did not know, when he was wakened by some one pulling him, and heard Mike's voice, shaking with fear:

"Wake up, Professor," muttered Mike, "and look at the say. Be jabers, the devil's around."

Ned woke up and looked round him.

The fog was as thick as ever, but something white seemed to be shaping itself out of the darkness, something vague, shadowy and unreal, like a cloud, and, forth from the darkness above it, gleamed a pair of eyes, that seemed to be glaring down on the occupants of the boat with malignant, fiery speculation. In a moment Ned had scrambled up and sat staring, spellbound.

CHAPTER V.

THE COMING OF THE ICE.

ALL around the boat eyerthing was silent as the grave, as the white thing slowly sailed by them, with the fiery eyes watching, and then they heard a low moaning sound that seemed to come from the depths of the sea, and the eyes vanished in the cloud.

The thing, whatever it was, moved slowly by them, and as slowly vanished into the same black darkness from whence it had come, when Mike whispered:

"Holy Mother! what was it, Professor?"

Norwood started at the question, and slapped the gunwale of the dory, forcing a laugh.

"What was it? Why, a piece of ice of course. What else could it be, Mike? We're a couple of fools to be so disturbed."

"Ay, ay," muttered Mike in the same guarded way, "but ice don't have eyes, and it don't groan. It's worse than that, Professor?"

"What do you say it is, then?" asked Norwood lightly, not unwilling to prolong the conversation, in the hope of whiling away the night.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when they heard through the fog, seemingly right overhead, the sound of something like the cry of a wild beast:

"OWGH! OWGH! OWGH!" it went.

Mike jumped up and shook like a leaf, as he began to recite a pater-noster, as fast as he could mutter it:

"Pater noster qui es in celis, sanctifi—

"OWGH! OWGH! OWGH!" came the sounds again, with such startling distinctness that Mike dropped on his knees, cowering in the bottom of the boat, to mutter the rest of the prayer inwardly to himself.

As for Norwood, he was more puzzled than he cared to admit, and felt the sweat stand out all over his body.

There was something so awful in the intense darkness and loneliness, with these sounds in the air above them, that he could not tell what to make of it.

Then came a strange rustling sound in the air like the flutter of wings, and they saw something white pass right over their heads so near that they felt the wind, and Mike cowered closer than before.

It passed on and disappeared, as had the other on the water, and Mike whispered:

"What was it, Professor? That wasn't ice."

And Ned could give him no answer but:

"Keep still, I tell you. We'll find out what it is. Listen closely."

They listened, and presently became sensible of a confused noise, like the chattering of birds in immense numbers, as they settle to sleep for the night in flocks.

It seemed to come, as did everything else, from up in the air, and ceased, like the rest, by becoming inaudible in the distance.

When it was over Mike was still praying harder than ever, but stopped to whisper:

"Oh, Professor, will we ever see the morning, d'ye think? Will we?"

"Why not?" asked Ned, banteringly. "This is nothing, Mike. It's dark, and our imaginations are in a state of excitement; that's all. I can't explain it yet, but it has some natural explanation. How long have you been a trawler?"

"Twenty years on the Banks, and never heard such a thing in me life. It's the devil, Professor. It's Davy Jones comin' on the Banks, and we'll have a terrible time. Holy Mother, what's that?"

A deep booming roar far away in the distance, followed by a report like a cannon, startled them again, and immediately after came the tinkle of a bell, rung violently, and a faint cry through the blackness of the night.

"It's the people of the Flash," said Norwood,

to reassure his companion. "Some ship is drifting down on them, perhaps."

A flash lighted up the fog, followed by the unmistakable boom of a gun, and Ned cried:

"There, I told you so. How foolish to be scared at nothing."

Mike made no answer, but listened intently.

The hollow boom of the gun continued to echo back and forth through the fog, seeming to come from a dozen different directions, and then all was silent again for awhile.

Presently they heard the tinkle of the Flash's bell and the sound of voices far away in loud, excited tones, till Mike whispered:

"'Tis the skipper's voice. Listen."

They distinctly heard the hoarse, powerful tones of Darke's voice shouting:

"Heave in strads, and trip the anchor."

A moment later, came the sound of another bell in the fog, accompanied by a dull hollow booming like that of surf on a rocky shore, and Mike whispered:

"Holy Mother! what's that?"

They could give no answer, but the sound became plainer and plainer, while the bells of the two vessels kept tinkling and tolling away, till the air round them seemed full of the deceptive accents, which they were unable to locate.

A very few moments of this sufficed to make even Ned Norwood, cool as he usually was, uncertain of everything in the thick darkness, and he, like Mike, fell into a dazed state when he could do nothing but sit and stare round him, wondering what was coming next.

Slowly and by degrees the tinkle of the bells became fainter and fainter, while the hollow boom of the surf receded from them, till at last all was silent again.

Mike was the first to break the silence.

"What'll we do now, Professor?"

Ned wiped his forehead.

"What can we do but wait till morning. Lie down and sleep again. We're fast to the trawl line; that's one thing certain."

They lay down again in the bow and stern of the dory, but sleep was out of the question. Their imaginations were too much excited for that.

Ned lay awake staring at the fog, and the air seemed full of misty shapes that he knew to be fictions of the brain, but which frequently became so real to his senses, that he could hardly help crying out.

At last, from very weariness, he fell asleep again, and dreamed that he was back on the decks of the Flash, and saw Darke on the heel of the bowsprit peering out over the sea into the fog.

He heard him say to some one:

"They'll never come back. It's no use looking for them."

It seemed to him in his dream as if he heard another voice, that of Murdock McCloud, answer:

"Eh, sirs, but the proverb's come true. There were thirteen aboard and one of them will ne'er return home."

Then the vision faded away to be replaced by another, and he thought the Flash was on a lee-hore in a heavy snow-storm with the roar of breakers close aboard, while Darke kept roaring:

"Hard a-lee! Hard a-lee! You Norwood tend jib there or you'll never get home to Alice."

The vessel seemed to be drifting closer and closer to the rocks and the roar of the surf became so loud that he finally woke up in a fright, to hear the same roar in plain reality close to the boat and to find the gray dawn stealing over the fog, while high up in the air a bright rosy glow of light was shining down on them and a great white wall of ice was sweeping down on the dory.

Then he understood it all in a moment.

The roaring he had heard was the breaking of the sea on icebergs, and one of these monsters of the deep was close aboard the dory and would overwhelm them in another instant if they did not do something desperate.

Mike Clancy lay on his back snoring and the young man hastily strove to unfasten the painter of the boat from the buoy line to which it had been tied in the night, yelling to Clancy:

"Wake up! Wake up! Ice close aboard."

In another moment the precipice seemed to be hanging right over the dory, and he managed to slip the painter, when he and Mike got to the oars and rowed desperately away.

Now that they could see, both recognized the imminent peril in which they were, for icebergs on the Grand Banks are constantly shifting and turning under the influence of the warmer waters of the Gulf Stream, melting away the part under water faster than that above and causing constant changes of equilibrium.

They forgot all about everything else, as they pulled madly away into the fog, and before they had gotten more than a hundred fathoms away from the iceberg their fears were verified.

With a hollow roar like thunder the rosy flush in the air vanished. They knew well enough whence it had come. The rays of the rising sun had caught the top of the berg above the fog, and now it was turning and turning toward them.

Down came the white wall into the sea, and a

huge wave came bearing down on the dory, so that they were within an inch of being swamped and capsized at the same moment.

For quite a little time the waves came sweeping out of the berg foot, and by the time they subsided the dory was half full of water, and both men had to bail her out as fast as they could, with one hand on an oar, pulling the boat out of further peril.

When they were at last out of peril it was broad daylight, and they could see through the white mantle of the fog the beautiful misty rainbows that told them they were in the midst of a perfect fleet of bergs that had floated down on them in the night.

As soon as they made this discovery Ned said to Clancy:

"I understand it all now. We're beset by ice. The sounds we heard last night were only the barking of seals and the noise of the seabirds. But we're in great danger, Mike."

Mike looked round him as they pulled on.

"And what'll we do, Professor?" he asked, with the simple trust of an ignorant man in the other's supposed knowledge.

Ned shook his head.

"God knows, Mike. We can only pull on and try to get out of the ice."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLASH IN THE FOG.

MEANTIME we must return to the Flash, and find what her captain had been doing all the time the dories had been out.

It seemed as if Samson Darke was more than commonly nervous and undecided that evening, for half the dories had not departed on their mission before he suddenly changed his mind, countermanded the orders, and sent to recall all that were out which had not already set their trawls.

He was in time to recall two boats, in which were Jim Clancy, Baptiste Landry and the two brothers McCloud, but darkness closed in on the Flash, and Ned Norwood's dory had not yet come in, when Jim Clancy came to Darke and said respectfully:

"Av ye'll let me toll the bell, skipper, me brother 'll hear it and get back. It's a bad time for a dory to be out alone."

Darke glanced around at the fast-gathering darkness and replied, with a shrug:

"All right; sound away. There's no need to be afraid. They'll be back very soon."

Jim began to sound the bell, and it was almost instantly replied to from the fog by a distant deep-toned bell, which they recognized as belonging to a large vessel.

Samson Darke smiled as he heard the reply, and rubbed his hands furtively.

"Silence fore and aft," he said. "Listen!"

In a little while they heard the unmistakable noise of the coming steamer, and Darke cried:

"Heave in your strads, boys! Haul in on the cable! We've got to keep our eyes wide open to-night."

The men ran to the cable, and hauled it in to unbind the protecting "strads," then began to pull in the schooner hand over hand toward her anchor.

Meantime the noise of the steamer came closer and closer, the bell of the Flash kept up a constant clang, and all the men not hauling on the cable ran aft to get lanterns and climb up the main rigging, to show them as conspicuously as possible in the thick fog and darkness.

Nearer and nearer came the low thunder of the big steamer and at last they saw her triangle of lights, white green and red, coming straight down on the anchored Flash.

Then all the fishermen united in a grand shout; the bell clanged louder than ever, and they heard the sharp "ting!" of the steamer's engine bell, signaling to reverse the engine. In another moment the red light vanished, the green one shone down on them and the huge bulk of a great ocean steamer swept by them, towering over the little Flash like a mountain, while a voice roared down:

"Schooner ahoy! Close shave for you! What schooner's that?"

"The Flash, of Gloucester!" roared Samson.

"What ship's that?"

"The City of Timbuctoo!" came back the answer. "Hollo!"

"Well?" replied Samson. "What is it?"

"There's ice all round here, and it will be on you before morning," cried the officer of the Timbuctoo. "You'd better haul short and be ready to trip. You can't lie here long."

"All right," shouted Samson. "Much obliged!"

Then they heard the engine bell ring to go ahead and the great steamer vanished in the fog and darkness, going to the southeast. Samson Darke rubbed his hands and smiled in a manner that indicated extreme delight, as he said to his men:

"Haul up as short as you can, boys, and be ready to trip."

Jim Clancy resumed his tolling at the bell, when Darke said snappishly:

"Stop that infernal noise, I can't here my self talk."

Jim stopped pulling, but ventured to say:

"The dory won't know where to go, sir, if we don't sound the bell."

Darke stamped his foot.

"I command this schooner. Do as I tell you, or I'll know the reason."

Jim obeyed and walked forward, but he murmured as he went and very soon the murmurs reached the others as they hauled in at the cable.

"We ought to keep on ringing," said one.

"It's a shame to leave good men to drown," said a second. "They'll never find us in the fog if we don't."

But Darke kept on deck and peered over the side into the fog as if he expected to see some signs of the boat, and kept saying:

"They'll soon be here; they must be. All the others have come in safe."

So matters stood for half an hour, and then Jim Clancy came aft with five more of the crew to say:

"Please, captain, can't we ring again and call out to the dory? Maybe me brother will hear us."

"Toll away," was the indifferent reply, and then the captain went forward to the bow to look ahead over the cable, for the expected ice.

The bell clanged again, and then of a sudden Darke started violently as something white sailed past the schooner in the gloom, and he heard the low moaning sound of an animal in distress.

The sweat stood on his forehead; but a moment later he uttered a forced laugh muttering:

"What a fool I am! It's only a big cake of ice, with a sick seal on it."

Darke had been on whaling voyages over all parts of the world, and his position on the deck of the schooner gave him a better view of what passed than could be had from a dory at the water's edge.

He watched the cake of ice sailing by, but it was too far off to see much of it, and soon after he heard the low rumble of the surf which told his practiced ear that the sea was breaking on an iceberg at no great distance.

"Come away from that bell," he shouted, and then, almost as he spoke, came the loud report which Norwood heard in the fog, and the captain roared:

"All hands to the cable. Haul in, men, the ice is coming."

The clang of the bell ceased, and the men rushed to the windlass.

Hurriedly the captain told them:

"An iceberg has broken in half. We've got to get out of this, and lucky if we can do it."

They hauled short on the cable, and just then the flash of a gun, followed by the loud tolling of a bell, announced that a vessel was near them, probably in distress.

"Heave in strads and trip the anchor," cried Darke, and very soon they felt the cable coming in with a lightness that told them the anchor had left the bottom.

Dense as was the fog there was a faint breeze stirring, and the Flash ran up her jib, fore-sail and mainsail, and moved slowly off before the wind.

Darke went to the bows to look out over the water and scanned it eagerly, while the crew of the Flash distributed themselves round the bulwarks, staring into the fog.

They had become so apprehensive of the ice that they had forgotten all about the dory which had gone off, and Darke had put Jim Clancy at the wheel.

Slowly the schooner glided along, the roaring of the breakers on the iceberg slowly receding, and at last the captain muttered to himself:

"Safe now, and no one can blame me."

Then he went back to the quarter-deck and told them to ring the bell again.

"The dory must be round here somewhere," he said. "The tide has carried it down, and I wouldn't lose those two men for a thousand dollars."

They tolled the bell again at intervals, and listened, till Jim Clancy suggested:

"Av we lay to till daylight, sir, we'll see 'em av they're not gone to the bottom."

"A good idea," said Darke, readily. "Haul in the sheets, boys, and bring her to the wind. We'll find them in daylight."

The Flash was brought to the wind and remained nearly stationary in the fog, when the captain sent below all but Jim Clancy and Murdock McCloud, with orders to keep a sharp lookout while he went to his cabin.

"I think we're clear of danger from the ice," he said. "If you hear the surf nearer let her off, and go on till it stops. Then bring her to once more."

He went below, and lay down in his bunk, while silence settled over the little vessel. He was the best seaman aboard, and he knew that the tide was running at the rate of two or three miles an hour, and that the ice was coming with it.

He knew well the direction taken by the dory, for he had taken its bearings at the binnacle, as he watched it depart.

He alone of all the crew had kept his head clear as the steamer passed them, and at the

sound of the cracking iceberg, and he knew that he had sailed away on a course diverging from that taken by the dory, which must be several miles off by this time.

He rubbed his hands furtively, and said to himself inaudibly:

"No one can blame me if the ice catches the young fool. I have to save the Flash. Ten lives are worth more than two. If he never comes back, I'll marry Alice Mason. She'll get over his loss. Married to him? So much the better. Widows are easily consoled. Samson Darke, you've played well, and luck favors you. The fog and the ice have done what naught else could have done so easily. Ned Norwood will never see Gloucester again."

He tried to sleep; but his rest was fitful and disturbed by dreams, in which he saw Ned Norwood pointing at him, and saying:

"You are my murderer, and I never sought to harm you. God will punish you for it."

He woke up in a cold sweat to see the light burning in the cabin as usual, and said to himself, as he turned over:

"Bah! 'tis but a dream. No one can blame me."

With the earliest dawn he was on deck, to find the same white fog over everything, the schooner drifting slowly to the southwest, with motionless sails, in a dead calm.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE FLOE.

WHEN Ned and his companion saw through the fog that they were fairly surrounded with icebergs, their consternation brought them to a state of calm.

Even Mike Clancy said resignedly:

"There's no gettin' out of it, Professor. Av we row, or av we lay still, we're bound to be drownded. Say your prayers, and let's die like men."

Ned Norwood looked into the fog all round and noticed a single circumstance that lent him encouragement.

"See," he said to Clancy, "the fog thins fast. We'll see them clearly soon, and be able to row out, maybe."

In fact, the vicinity of the ice, while creating a mist, tended to condense the vapor that hung over the sea, and make it assume the form of rain, while the splendid hues of the bergs, as the sun shone in on them above the fog, made a spectacle of great beauty, had not the danger been too imminent to allow the lonely voyagers to enjoy it.

As they became able to see things, they found that the nearest bergs were less than two hundred fathoms away, while in one spot there was an opening about a quarter of a mile wide, beyond which stretched a white line of field ice, which, could they reach, they might escape to the bergs.

But to get there they would have to run the gauntlet of a fleet of the moving ice-mountains, which were toppling over and settling every moment, raising huge waves.

Norwood pointed out the opening to Mike.

"If we reach that," he said, "we may save our lives. Are you ready to try?"

Mike nodded gloomily.

"As well that as anything else," he said. "I'll stick by ye, but it's no use."

"Get to your oars then, and pull," said Ned cheerily. "We'll beat death yet, Mike."

They pulled steadily on till they came to the place where a heavy sea was constantly running, on account of the toppling bergs. Here the waves gave them a great deal of trouble, tossing the little dory about like a cork and compelling them to exercise the most watchful care to keep from being swamped.

One berg fell over toward them and the resultant wave sent them over near the foot of another in the very act of turning; but luckily for them the second fell away from them, and they escaped being completely buried in the sea.

At last they saw the field-ice stretching before them, and the bergs were at a safer distance, when Ned found time to say:

"Never despair, Mike. We'll be saved yet. See, it's clear over the ice, and the wind's changin'. We shall be saved yet."

Mike only groaned.

"Saved! Yes, to starve to death."

But he pulled steadily on for all that, and in half an hour's hard work they reached the edge of an enormous ice-field, in the midst of which several bergs were entangled, at long intervals from each other.

The ice seemed to be seven or eight feet thick, and the wearied men scrambled on the top and drew up the dory.

Far as they could see, the water was covered with the same white field, and, though the fog hung over the ice, it was not so thick, but what they could see numerous dark figures moving about, to which Ned at once called his companion's attention.

"Look, Mike," he said, "there's no fear of our starving here. The ice is covered with seals and sea-birds."

Mike persisted in taking a gloomy view of the situation.

"Sails and say-birds," he repeated scornfully, "and how'll we kill 'em, Professor?"

"You've a knife, and I've another," said Ned, in the same cheery way. "I've read that seals are very stupid creatures, and we may be able to knock them on the head with an oar."

Mike shook his head mournfully.

"And av we ate the mate raw, what'll we have to drink? There's nothin' but salt water all round us."

Ned took the bailing scoop of the dory, walked a few steps and filled it at one of the pools dotting the ice. He tasted the water and found it brackish.

He was much disappointed, for he had had an idea that salt-water ice melted into fresh water, and Mike said gloomily:

"It's no use, Professor. All the college larnin' won't bring us out of this. Salt water won't make fresh, all the world over."

Norwood pointed to the bergs floating at the edge of the ice-fields.

"Those at least are fresh-water ice, Mike. We'll not suffer from thirst yet."

"And how'll we get the water from them?" asked Mike, "and they turnin' over all the time."

Norwood had to own he was puzzled, but presently cheered up.

"Yonder are several frozen into this field, Mike. They won't turn over. Let's go and get a drink from the nearest. Drag the boat along."

The nearest berg was nearly a quarter of a mile off, and they had no difficulty in pushing the light dory over the smooth field to the foot of the ice mountain, which was a block not over three hundred feet square and about thirty above the level of the ice.

It seemed to have been firmly frozen into the main field at some distant period, and when they chipped off some pieces and placed them in their mouths, Mike observed with satisfaction:

"Fresh water, sure enough, Professor. How the devil did ye know that?"

Ned smiled.

"By reading; but I thought every one knew it, Mike. A berg is the end of a glacier, and comes from the land."

He surveyed the berg carefully, and walked round it for some time.

At last he said:

"Mike, I've got an idea."

"And what is it, Professor?"

"We'd better stay here. It's the safest place we can find."

Mike looked stupid.

"Safest?"

"Yes, safest. We might have hunted a year and not found as good a one."

Mike looked ruefully round over the desolate stretch of ice and fog.

"Ye've a quare notion of what's a nice place," was all he could find heart to say.

Norwood laughed at his face.

"I mean comparatively, Mike. Positively, I'd like to be back in the Flash, but we can't find her till the fog lifts."

"True for ye, Professor."

"And it may not lift for days."

Mike nodded gloomily.

"It's a tin days' fog, I'll go bail, and sorra lift will there be to it till the ice melts."

"Then, during that time, we're lucky to have food and drink secured to us. The very dumb beasts show us how to live. They all come to the floating ice. We can catch fish—"

"Catch fish?" echoed Mike; "and with what? D'y'e mind we left the trawl behind us under the iceberg, and divil a hook have we got left."

Ned felt in his side pockets.

"I had a fish-line here," he said. "I'm sure I did. It wasn't much, but it will catch something. Ay, here it is; not much; but a hundred feet's better than nothing."

"Ye'll not catch so much as a porgy," said Mike, scornfully. "D'y'e mind we're out in sivinty five fathoms water, Professor?"

"Well, we can try, anyhow. If the worst comes to us, yonder's meat on the ice-floe."

And he pointed to the seals that lay about on the ice, with a confidence and tameness that showed they were not often hunted.

"Furthermore," he pursued, "there's another point you don't see. This berg is frozen fast in this floe, and it is such a shape that it won't turn over when all the ice melts away from round it. It's seven or eight times as long as it is high, and it will settle equally. As long as it doesn't all melt away we're sure of a home. I vote to drag the dory up on the top, and try to make ourselves as comfortable as we can."

Mike was about to answer when they heard a hoarse growl near them, and looking round the edge of the log saw an immense polar bear, marching stealthily out from behind a block of ice.

Mike dropped on his knees, and Norwood, with a not unpardonable tremor, crouched down behind the dory.

He had noticed that the bear was intent on the seals, and not on them.

The animal stopped to snuff the wind and eye the unconscious seals, and then set out at a rapid lumbering gallop over the ice, while the

alarmed seals, that had been perfectly quiet when men passed them, seemed to know their born enemy and went flopping and scrambling off to the edge of the floe, as fast as they could.

Not fast enough for the bear however.

The huge beast overtook several on their way to the water, dealt each a side stroke with his enormous paw as he passed, and rushed on, as if determined to take all he could get.

The belated fishermen watched him, and in less than in five minutes not a live seal was left on the floe, while the huge bear was lying down over one of the bodies, crushing the bones and drinking the blood with an avidity that showed he was ravenously hungry.

Mike whispered, trembling:

"What's that, Professor?"

"A polar bear. He must have floated all the way from Greenland, and when the ice melts that's the last of him."

"And won't he ate us?"

"I don't know. I fancy not while the seals are around us, but we must be careful not to anger him. Hollo, what's that?"

Another growl, but this time of a different character. The mutter of distant thunder.

They saw the bear lift his head and stop his meal, while, beyond him, a black cloud was slowly gathering over the ice-field, and driving forward at great speed, the mist before it thickening every moment.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FROZEN HOME.

A THUNDER-STORM was sweeping rapidly over the ice, and Norwood said:

"We'll have fresh water enough now."

Mike looked apprehensively at the cloud.

"And the ice will break up, maybe," said he. Norwood pointed to the berg.

"That doesn't break up so soon, Mike. I told you we couldn't be in a better place. Let's get up on it, while we can."

They skirted round the berg and found that fine end had a gradual slope to the level of the old-ice, up which they dragged the dory, and found themselves on the top of the berg just as the thunder-storm came down on them, in a deluge of rain and a tearing wind.

They overturned the dory and got under the lee of it, when the storm passed over them with several smart peals of thunder and a little lightning, but nothing like a summer storm, and not lasting over ten minutes.

When it had passed over Norwood looked back over the ice, and saw with joy that the mist had lifted to the north, that a broad line of blue sky was steadily advancing, and that a cold north wind had set in.

An hour later, the prospect was clear all round the horizon, the sun shining in the blue sky, and they could see the open ocean, studded with fleets of bergs at the edge of the ice-field; but without a single sail in sight.

The wind blew quite cold, and it began to freeze almost immediately.

They looked over the ice and saw the bear at his meal, quite undisturbed, and Mike said in a rueful tone:

"Bedad, the b'aste has the best of us, Professor."

"Why, Mike?"

"He seems at home here, and sorra much home can I see."

Ned pointed to the dead seals lying on the ice at intervals, where the bear had thrown them as he passed on:

"There's enough food there to keep us for weeks, and here'senty of water. We're drifting south into the track of ships all the while, and we're sure to be picked up in the end."

Mike had been looking out also; but in a different spirit, for the poor fellow was completely disheartened.

Suddenly his face lighted up, as he saw on the blue horizon, at the edge of the ice to the west, a white speck.

"A sail, Professor, a sail!" he cried. "It's the Flash come to look after us."

Norwood looked, and saw that Mike was right.

The white speck was unquestionably a sail, but so far off that they could only guess it to be a schooner, and they had no glass to determine anything further.

Whoever and whatever she was she was moving slowly to the north along the edge of the ice at least twenty miles away. When they went down on the ice-floe, she disappeared entirely. They could only see her from the top of the berg.

Mike seemed to be wonderfully comforted by the sight of the sail.

"It's the Flash," he insisted, "come to look for us. Me brother Jim and the boys won't go back on us, Professor."

Norwood, on his part, did not feel so confident. He could not forget the language of the captain the day before, and felt apprehensive that Darke would leave them if he saw a fair chance to do so without incurring the name of a deliberate murderer.

"Let's go over the ice," suggested Mike, "and make for the schooner. Sure, she can't see us here."

Ned pointed down to the bear, still at his meal between them and the sail.

"Do you think he'd let us pass? No, Mike, we shall have to be patient a while. If that is the Flash looking for us, she'll go round the ice-fields, and not give up the search till she finds us."

Mike stood up, and continued his search in other directions over the ice.

Away to the north, several miles off, they saw a number of black spots that they took to be seals, while the whole surface of the floe was dotted with sea-birds, that came circling in from the open water on all sides.

Seals and birds alike displayed one feature of similarity, that they kept near the edge of the ice, as if their instinct taught them that safety lay in the depths of the ocean.

Norwood, in his turn, scanned the floe to settle in his mind its extent, and after a long examination, came to the conclusion that it must be of very large extent.

To the north and west he could see no limit, and to the southwest it stretched away constantly advancing.

The only open place appeared to be due east and northeast, where the sea was clear, but no sign of a sail could be seen there.

Mike suddenly attracted his attention by pulling his sleeve.

"Professor," he said, in a low tone, "the big baste's goin' off!"

"So much the better," said Ned, as he looked down on the surface of the floe.

The white bear had entirely finished his seal and was slowly shuffling away toward the open water, where sailed the fleet of bergs, leaving the other slaughtered seals lying round on the ice.

They saw him go to the water, dash in and swim away to one of the bergs, up which he climbed as if to enjoy the rocking.

"He finds the weather too warm here," said Ned. "It feels cold to us, but he's used to zero and twenty below it. Now, Mike, let's go down and bring in one of those seals. I see driftwood on the ice and I think we can make a fire."

"A fire!" echoed Mike. "And won't we burn holes in the ice, alannah?"

"Not if we're careful. Have you any matches in your pocket?"

"Bedad, I have, Professor, and a pipe, too; but me insides is that hollow I'd not the heart to light it."

"Don't think of lighting a pipe, man. Every match is precious, when you've no means of getting more. First let's go for the seals."

They descended the berg and made for the nearest seal, but Ned kept a sharp lookout for the berg, on which the bear was still enjoying himself.

He saw the animal get up as soon as they approached the dead seal, and begin to descend the berg toward them.

"Leave the seal alone," Ned whispered to Mike, "and walk away slowly with me, or we shall be in a scrape."

Mike looked round, saw the bear, and it needed no further warning to make him obey the injunction.

When they had gone about a hundred yards they looked round.

The bear had lain down on the berg again, and was watching them, as much as to say:

"I don't want to hurt you; but you leave my dinner alone. I shall be hungry very soon."

Mike shook his fist stealthily.

"The ill-mannered baste," he grumbled. "He's a regular dog in the manger. He can't eat it himself, and he won't give us a chance to take a bite."

"I suppose he thinks we'd better catch our own meat," said Ned Norwood. "I don't know but he's right, Mike. Man's a helpless being compared to a beast, left to himself. Let's come on and try our luck."

They took their way over the ice toward a huge berg, about three miles off, frozen into the substance of the floe.

All round it the ice had been tilted up on edge and frozen fast into tables and cakes, showing where the mountain had gone crashing through the floe at some time when the latter had jammed up against the land.

Now, when there was no resistance, the berg seemed to be as solid as all the rest, and it was so enormous in size that Mike ejaculated:

"Holy smoke, Professor, it's big enough to hold half of Gloucester on the top. And just look at the birds, sir."

In fact, the whole top of the ice-mountain was black with gulls and auks, and there were signs about it that made Ned say:

"This is an old berg, Mike. I mean that it has passed through more than one winter and summer. Look how dirty the top is. I wouldn't wonder if we find it full of nests and eggs."

They walked round it to inspect it closely, and found it to be a most wonderful creation.

Evidently at some former time it had been subject to action of the sea, and had then been driven bodily into a floe.

One side towered in the air at least three hundred feet, and was honeycombed with caverns, into which the floe-ice had been driven and

frozen fast, after piling itself up in tables and hummocks.

These caverns had evidently existed for a long time, for they were full of sea-birds, and, as Ned had suspected, most of them had built nests in the sheltered places.

The cold nipping north wind had dried up the berg by freezing the drippings into icicles, and everything looked so comfortable that Mike observed:

"The birds know when they're well off, Professor. Bedad, I wish we were birds."

"We've more sense than the birds," said Ned cheerfully. "If they know enough to come here and live we can do the same and live on them besides. Let's hunt for fresh eggs. If you find a nest without a bird on it you may be sure the eggs are good yet. Eggs are better than starving."

"Ye may say that," returned Mike. "It's often meself has sucked eggs in the ould country. Here's a nest."

CHAPTER IX.

STRANGERS ON THE ICE.

NED'S conjectures turned out to be correct. The honeycombed berg fairly swarmed with birds, and in ten minutes they found so many eggs that Mike began to grow delicate and remarked to his companion:

"Raw eggs is said to be unwholesome, and I'm thinkin' we ought to cook 'em. Here's the nests all made of dry sticks. Why wouldn't we make a fire of 'em?"

"Because, to do so, we must frighten off all the birds, Mike. Eat your fill and don't disturb them more than you can help. As long as they stay here, we're safe from starvation, but as soon as they go where are we?"

"In the say," replied Mike dryly, "and I'm thinkin' we're not much better off anyway, Professor, for devil a way do I see of gettin' off this ice."

Ned made no answer, for he was getting provoked with Mike for looking at things in the lugubrious way in which he did. Their appetites satisfied, the belated men set out to explore the vicinity of the berg, which they found nearly a mile in circumference, the top quite easy of ascent, and covered with nests made of dry sticks and seaweed, showing it to be an old berg, used for more than a single year.

It belonged to that class of bergs always of the largest size, which draw several hundred feet of water, and frequently ground in their passage down Baffin's Bay toward the ocean.

If this happens in summer, they usually float clear and go to destruction before reaching the banks of Newfoundland; but if they strike late in the season they are apt to remain where they ground till next year and can readily be distinguished by their dirty appearance.

The adventurers were by no means free from uneasiness in fear of coming on another polar bear, for they were quite unarmed save for their sheath knives, but the floe seemed to be unattended, as far as they could make out, by anything dangerous.

The sun was about four hours high when Ned proposed that they should set out over the ice to the other side, to find out whether the Flash was anywhere near, that they might signal to her.

The frost still held, but gave promise of abating under the rays of the sun, and they knew that if the ice began to break up their position would become one of great peril under any circumstances.

Ned only wondered that there was no symptom of cracks in the ice, and reasoned that the field must be very compact and thick to hold together so well.

They set off toward the northwest where they saw a lofty berg, about two miles off, and found it of the same character as the one they had left, old, full of caves, piled with ice and inhabited by sea-birds.

He proposed to Mike that they should climb to the top and obtain a view over the floe. Mike, nothing loth, followed, and in ten minutes' hard scrambling they stood on the summit, nearly three hundred feet above the level of the sea.

Then they looked out over a circuit of forty or fifty miles, and saw the whole extent of the ice cake on which they were, studded with bergs.

Mike uttered a cry of joy.

"There's the schooner. I told ye she was lookin' for us."

Away off in the northwest, a good ten or fifteen miles from where they were, the schooner was coasting the edge of the floe, under easy sail.

The ice on which they were was a long, irregularly shaped mass, that resembled strongly the outline of Long Island in miniature.

It measured about five miles across at the broadest point, and seemed to be about twenty-five miles in extreme length. Bergs were imbedded in it like mountains on an island, and dark patches here and there showed that it was largely composed of old ice that had followed the outline of some shore.

Ned and his companion surveyed it with great care and then gathered together a pile of old

nests of sea-birds, lighted the dry sticks of which they were made, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing a dark column of smoke rise to the sky.

"They can't help seeing that on a day like this," said Ned, half to himself.

"And why shouldn't they?" asked Mike. "Av coarse they'll see it. Wouldn't they be lookin' for us, as we'd be lookin' for them, if we were in the same box?"

Ned did not tell him what reason he had for fearing Darke might not notice them; besides which, he knew that even the half-crazy captain of the Flash could not abandon the men of his crew openly.

He watched the Flash and saw her sailing on as quietly as before, toward the north, her stern turned to the smoke, and he said to Mike:

"I fear we're not seen. They're looking out ahead, not astern. We shall have to follow the vessel if we hope to reach it. They're going further all the time."

"But they're coasting round all the while," objected Mike. "They're bound to see us at last. Let's go after them, alannah."

They scrambled down the berg and began to run toward the schooner, when they heard a loud crack in the ice, followed by a hollow groan that went quivering through the whole breadth of the floe.

"Back to the berg!" cried Ned who knew what was coming, and back they ran for dear life, just in time.

Hardly had they got to it, when the groan in the floe became a roaring series of reports, and they saw that Long Island had parted in the middle, with a gap that widened at one end, in a way that showed the floe was turning round in some powerful current.

The berg on which they stood was left by the rupture at the water's edge of part of the big cake, and Ned said to Mike:

"We've no time to lose. This may break off next. We must get back to the dory, or we shall leave our bones for the fishes."

Mike had too much confidence in his friend's knowledge to hesitate, and they set off at a trot to reach the place where they had left the dory on the summit of the small berg. On their way they noticed that pools of water had collected on the floe and realized for the first time that it had stopped freezing.

The April sun had proved too much for the north wind, which already had dropped nearly to a calm, and by the time they reached the end of the berg where they had left the dory, they found themselves sweating under their heavy pilot coats.

"Bedad, ould dory," said Mike, affectionately patting the inanimate boat, "I'll not be l'avin' ye again in a hurry."

Then they looked out where the loose bergs had been floating, and discovered that they had gained on the floe, offering more surface for the wind to act on, till they were nearly half a mile away.

The one which contained the polar bear was not to be seen, and the fishermen took the opportunity to drag one of the dead seals to their dory and cut up enough meat to render them independent of food for a week.

Then they set off for the ancient iceberg, where birds' nests and drift-wood abounded, dragging the boat with them.

Their recent peril made them wary of parting from their only friend.

They made up their minds, too, that the old berg offered a better point of refuge than the little one, and Ned told Mike:

"Heaven knows how long we shall stay here; but that berg will last three weeks at the rate it's going now."

"Three weeks!" echoed Mike, aghast. "We won't stay here that long, will we?"

"I fear we shall," answered Ned, a little gloomily. "I don't see the Flash any more."

"But she'll come for us," said Mike, eagerly.

"Oh, Professor, she *must* come for us."

Ned made no reply. He collected a heap of drift-wood that lay all round the foot of the berg, and began to build a fire in such a way that it should not touch the ice.

This was easy enough, for logs were plentiful, but small, and the two fishermen were soon roasting seal-meat at their improvised furnace, and laying up a store for the future when they would be unable to cook.

When they had put away some fifty pounds of the meat under the stern-sheets of the dory, Mike began to feel thirsty, and went up the berg to find a clean place for fresh water, while Ned Norwood, in a brown study, sat over the fire, absently toasting his meat, and brooding over the fact of his abandonment by Darke, and what was to come of it.

Suddenly he was roused from his abstraction by a loud cry, and Mike Clancy came sliding down the slope of the berg, yelling:

"Professor, Professor! Holy fathers! there's a lot of fellies comin', and they've got guns, the murderin' haythens! Ochone! we'll be all kilt now, for sure."

Ned started up and ran round the corner of the berg to look. A party of men were coming over the ice to the berg, and, as Mike had said, all had guns.

CHAPTER X.

THE SPANIARDS.

NORWOOD'S first sensation was wonder. How could these men have come here?

Then he remembered the gun he had heard in the fog the previous night, and it became clear to him.

"Don't be afraid, Mike," he said. "Their vessel has been nipped in the ice, and they are just as unfortunate as we are; more so indeed, for they have lost their ship."

He and Mike scanned the new-comers closely, as they advanced to the number of near twenty.

There was something strange about them.

They were no fishermen, and did not look like American sailors.

Their faces were dark and foreign, most of them had earrings in their ears, and all wore mustaches and pointed beards.

Their dress seemed to be some sort of uniform, with bright colors to relieve the dark blue, and the leader had a red cap with a gold tassel.

All carried weapons of some sort, the most having a cutlass and rifle at least.

The leader had no less than four revolvers in his belt, and was a very handsome man. As he came up he touched his cap to Ned and said politely:

"*Se habla espanol, amigo?*"

Ned understood that he was asked if he could talk Spanish, so he replied:

"No, signor, no. Don't understand it. We are Americans."

The Spaniard smiled:

"Aha, Americanos! Goot, goot! You spik Inglis'. I spik goot, very goot Inglis'. Vere you come, ha?"

"Where do I come?" echoed Ned, puzzled. "I don't know what you mean."

"Vere from?" replied the Spaniard in a manner that showed his contempt of Ned for not understanding him. "I spik ver' good Inglis'. Vere from?"

"From Gloucester," answered Ned.

"Glo-sta, Gloo-sta—vere dat?" asked the Spanish officer.

Ned pointed westward.

"American coast," he said. "Fishing-port. You—where from?"

"Matanzas," was the polite reply, and then he seemed to be puzzled, for he turned to one of his crew and uttered a rapid torrent of Spanish, at which a small, weazened old sailor came up and said to Ned in better English:

"De tenente he say, me tell you, ve vas all broke up in de ice last night. De sheep 'e go—go down, and we get out wiz two boat. De captain 'e drown, and all de rest. 'Ow you come 'ere 'e say?"

Ned gave a short account of his adventures the previous night, adding:

"But what was the name of your vessel?"

The Spaniard seemed to hesitate about his answer; for a great deal of gabbling ensued between him and his friends:

At last he said:

"Senor Saluda say dat none of your beezness. You ask no question."

"Oh, certainly," returned Ned eagerly. "I don't wish to pry into your affairs of course; but we're all brothers in misfortune, you know."

The Spaniard nodded.

"All righta. Vere your schoonera?"

Ned sighed heavily.

"I don't know."

The Spaniard seemed pleased at the answer.

"You no see her, ha?"

"We did see her, or thought we did," returned Ned, pointing to the northwest, "but since the ice began to break up, I see her no more. I fear she's left us."

The Spanish lieutenant seemed to be better pleased than before with the answer.

"You coma—here," he said, "commigo,—dat is—"

Here he stuck fast and began to jabber to Domingo, the weazened old sailor, who came to his help, saying:

"Senor Saluda 'e say, you coma wiz us, and you s'all be 'appy."

"Happy!" echoed Ned. "What do you mean by that? Come where? How did you find us anyhow?"

Domingo grinned.

"You ask no question. Ve watch you all de morninga. Ve 'ave boat out dere."

He pointed to a small berg at the edge of the floe—one they had not yet examined.

"You comea wiz us," he said.

As he spoke, the Spaniards began to handle their rifles in such an ominous way that Mike ejaculated:

"Holy fathers! are they goin' to shoot?"

"Not if we go with them, I fancy," returned Ned. "There's some mystery I don't fathom here, Mike; but at least they're not as bad as the bear."

Then to Saluda he said:

"Go on, sir. We'll follow you and bring our boat with us."

Saluda frowned.

"No, no; ve 'ave boat—no—no boat."

Domingo touched Ned's arm, saying:

"Ve 'ave plente room. It is beeg boat."

Then they marched across the floe to the small berg and discovered, drawn up on the ice, a large ship's launch, big enough to hold fifty men at a pinch, with a small steam engine in the stern, besides two masts and sails.

The lieutenant seemed to be very uneasy for some reason, and kept exploring the edge of the floe with his glass, especially toward that part of the sea whence the Flash might be expected to make her appearance.

He called to his men and made signs for the belated fishermen to assist, while they moved the boat round to the other side of the iceberg, so as not to be visible from the east.

Then they all sat down and watched the day slowly decline till the evening came, and just as the sun sunk into the sea, Mike cried:

"There's the Flash, bedad. I knew she'd come."

They looked up along the edge of the floe, and sure enough there was the gallant little vessel with all her sails set, coming along the edge of the ice in a way that showed she was exploring for her lost ones.

Ned felt a thrill of compunction as he said to himself:

"I've wronged Darke. I thought he had given us up on purpose."

The Spaniards saw the schooner coming, and began to jabber to each other as she came more and more plainly in sight. At last Domingo came to Norwood.

"Data your sheep?" he said inquisitively.

"Yes. The schooner Flash."

"She gooda boat?"

"None better. Very fast: good sea-boat."

"Aha! Goot!"

Domingo went back to his officer and they jabbered faster than ever, there seeming to be a difference of opinion between them as to what to do.

Ned Norwood was walking out to hail the schooner when Domingo called out:

"*Cuidado!*"

At the same time he cocked his rifle, and Ned knew enough to understand that "*cuidado!*" meant "look out."

He stopped, and Saluda motioned him to come back.

He obeyed, wondering much what it all meant and Mike muttered:

"Holy fathers! Maybe it's pirates they are, bad luck to them!"

Norwood knew they could not be pirates; but he was very much puzzled as to what to make of their behavior.

The Spaniards were evidently fearful of being seen; but why?

There was no war between Spain and the United States.

While he was cogitating over what it could all mean, he was roused from his fit of abstraction by noticing the white body of the polar bear, moving over the ice toward them, about a quarter of a mile away, among the dead seals.

The animal had probably swum back to finish his meal and gorge himself.

The Spaniards saw it too and began to talk together in a nervous, excited way, when Ned made a sign to Mike.

The Irish fisherman had been sitting in the background, smoking his pipe with as much philosophy as he could assume, and none of the Spaniards were looking in his direction.

Mike understood the signal, and he stole off round the corner of the berg, unseen and made the best of his way toward the Flash, now not more than two miles off and coming down wing and wing.

The Spaniards did not notice his departure for some little time, till Domingo suddenly started and cried out:

"*En donde el pescador?*" [Where's the fisherman?]

In a moment the whole party was up, with cocked rifles, threatening Ned.

"Vere 'e go?" vociferated Saluda.

"Round yonder to hail the schooner," said Ned, calmly. "What's the matter? Surely you want to be taken off, don't you?"

The Spaniard ground his teeth viciously, and ran round the corner of the berg.

Mike's figure was visible about two hundred yards off running toward the Flash.

"Come backa!" roared Saluda, and then he pitched his rifle to his shoulder, took a careful aim and was just pressing the trigger when Ned Norwood seized the rifle, and wrenched it away in time to prevent its discharge.

Then, knowing that his life depended on his activity and strength he whirled the clubbed weapon round his head, dealt Saluda a blow that leveled him, dashed the butt into Domingo's face as he rushed up, and then set off at a fast run, yelling to Mike:

"Run! run! We'll beat 'em yet, Mike."

He heard the shouts of the Spaniards behind him, and then saw the Flash come bowing down the edge of the ice-floe to meet the fugitives.

CHAPTER XI.

LEFT BEHIND.

THE sun had set, but the twilight remained, as Ned and Mike sped away over the ice.

The Irishman was away ahead, for he had a long start; but Ned soon ascertained that he was not followed, for he looked back over his shoulder, and saw that the Spaniards had disappeared.

They had gone to their boat behind the small berg, and Norwood could see the bow of the little craft, being shoved out to the water's edge as if they were going to put to sea.

Knowing well enough that they could not catch him, he slackened his pace and went on more leisurely toward the Flash, while Mike kept on running as hard as he could go, evidently frightened to death.

Thus it chanced, within a few minutes, that the Flash had come up to the edge of the ice, a dory had been dropped from her side, and Mike had jumped into it, when Ned was still several hundred yards behind. And just at that moment he heard the cracking of rifle-shots, and saw the Spanish boat in the water, coming up the edge of the ice toward the Flash, the men firing rapidly at the dory and schooner, while a column of smoke told that the launch was getting up steam to pursue the Flash, and the men were pulling her along with oars besides.

Ned ran on, waving his hat, when, to his surprise and dismay, the dory, with Mike in it, pulled off to the schooner, and he heard Darke's voice roaring:

"Hard a-starboard! Man fore and main sheets. Trim them in, boys! No time to lose! The pirates are out!"

"Stop!" shouted Ned wildly. "Stop! Don't leave me here all alone!"

But before he could get opposite the Flash, the schooner had swept round her head, trimmed in her sheets, and was bowing away, hugging the wind closely, the dory trailing behind her by the painter, the schooner careening over under all sail, and going at ten or twelve knots an hour.

He looked at the Spanish boat and saw that it was still moving up the line of the floe toward him, so that he realized that he could not escape recapture by her, unless he tried to get away over the ice."

For a few moments he fancied that the Flash might come back for him, after all; but as she grew more and more distant, while the Spanish boat grew nearer, he realized that he had been abandoned.

He turned at once and ran off over the ice-floe, skirting round to get to the place where the dory had been left; but before he got there he saw the white form of the bear crouching on the ice over the dead seal, and the animal sprung up and made a savage rush toward him, so that he saw he could not get to the dory.

Then, in a state of sullen desperation, he went back toward the water's edge and stood waiting for the Spanish boat to come up, the Flash being by this time half a mile away, working back up the floe.

The Spaniards seemed to have given up the chase of the Flash, for their boat came gliding up to the edge of the floe, and the old sailor, Domingo, called to Ned:

"You coma borda!"

Ned had no alternative but to obey, and he managed to climb on board the launch, when Saluda gave some orders in Spanish, and the puffing of the little engine announced that they had succeeded in getting up steam at last.

Ned once aboard, they took no further notice of him, but Saluda told him, gruffly:

"You sitta downa."

Then away went the steam launch straight into the wind's eye, up the edge of the floe, with the plain object of intercepting the Flash, if possible.

Ned Norwood sat quietly down where he was told and watched everything, with the idea of penetrating the mystery that surrounded him.

Who were these Spaniards and what did they want of the schooner?

The launch was comfortably, even luxuriously fitted, and he saw in gilt letters on the front of the little engine-house, the word:

"Liberador."

Then it suddenly came to his mind that he had heard of a rebellion in Cuba, which had been reported suppressed, time and time again, but which it was often rumored still existed in spots here and there.

Was it possible that the vessel which had gone down in the ice was a Cuban cruiser? If so, it would account for all, for the fear and secrecy in which everything was hidden, and for the attempt of the boat to take the Flash.

The unfortunate Cubans wanted to seize the schooner and make their escape somewhere, in a craft not so easily recognized as their own little launch.

While he was cogitating over what was to come of all this, the steam launch, going directly into the wind's eye, had arrived at the weather gauge of the Flash, and turned to pursue the schooner.

The Flash kept on her course, nearly invisible in the darkness, on account of being close-hauled, her sails turned edgewise to the pursuing boat, but it soon became plain even in the darkness that the steam launch was gaining on the sailing-vessel, as gain it must on equal terms.

Ned could soon hear voices on the schooner shouting orders and encouragements, and he distinguished Darke's tones.

"Bear a hand to set the maintopmast staysail. We'll beat the cusses yet."

He saw the staysail go fluttering up like a great white bird, and the Flash began to creep away in the darkness, when Ned noticed that the Spaniards began to jabber to each other, and seemed much excited.

He soon found the cause when he looked in front of the little engine furnace. The wood-box was empty.

It was plain that the launch could no longer keep up her steam, and could not catch the Flash, going as they were.

The failure in the heat of the fire soon showed itself in the puffing of the steam as it decreased in the boiler, and after an hour of this sort of work the Flash had vanished in the darkness, while the launch hoisted two lug-sails and stood away to the south, her men silent and sullen, the wind blowing from northwest.

Then Ned Norwood heard the voice of Saluda calling him.

"You comea here."

He went and found the lieutenant looking very gloomy and downcast, and Domingo began to tell him in his broken English, as well as he could, what they had been talking about during the chase.

He found that he was right in his conjecture as to the identity of the sunken vessel. She was the *Liberador*, a Cuban cruiser that had been built in the harbor of New York under pretense of being a peaceful vessel, and had slipped out under the nose of the Spanish consul, to meet out at sea another peaceful craft that contained the armament and crew of the *Liberador* in her hold and cabin as freight and passengers.

It was her first cruise, and she had been hanging round the Banks of Newfoundland looking out for Spanish traders bound to the United States, when she had been caught in the fog and ice together unawares, and found herself nipped between two icebergs. It was her gun the fishermen had heard the night before, just before she went down.

But for the fact that only the forward part of the ship had been crushed by the bergs, and that the ice had lifted the ship bodily, and held it suspended for some time, the few survivors would not have got off.

Domingo told him that thirty men, the lieutenant Saluda, and two boats, had made their escape over the ice in the dark, but he feared that the other boat must have come to harm in the thick fog, as they had missed each other in the night, and had seen nothing of the other boat since that time.

"And now," he concluded, "Senor Saluda, 'e say to you, 'e ver' sorry 'e 'ave to take you viz 'eem, but it cannot be 'elp. All de world against *Cuba Libre*. You go viz us, you be reech. You try to go 'vay, 'e 'ave to keel you. Vat you say? you come?"

Ned Norwood began to understand his position and the reason why they had kept him so close a prisoner. He understood why the Spaniards had fired at Mike Clancy. They were afraid of discovery, and that was all.

It did not take him long to make up his mind what to do. He had long been weary of the dull, uneventful life of a fisherman, and he saw, in his present accidental meeting with the Cubans, much adventure, and a possible profit, that was the more alluring, because so strange and romantic.

"I will go with you," he said to Saluda, "and do my best to help you; but you must not expect me to fight, save in self-defense. My nation is not at war with Spain."

Saluda smiled rather ruefully, and replied:

"You defenda, youseffa—ver' goot! I take you. You be goot soldado."

CHAPTER XII.

DARKE'S PROJECTS.

THE fishing-schooner Flash went skimming over the waters of the open ocean, heading due east, after the Spanish boat gave up the chase, and Samson Darke chuckled to himself as he muttered:

"Couldn't have turned out better. No one can blame me; but he'll never come back."

He had, in obedience to the wishes of his crew, hung round the ice till the fog cleared away, and circumnavigated the huge island in search of the missing dory; but he had all the time had knowledge they did not possess.

He had been looking out of his cabin windows, glass in hand, at the time Ned and Mike lighted their beacon-fire, on top of the iceberg, and had trembled for fear it should be seen.

He had watched the breaking of the big floe with secret joy, because it diverted the attention of his men to other objects, and made the undertaking of circumnavigating the ice-island more difficult.

He maintained an ostentatious appearance of interest in the search, while constantly reminding his men that it would probably be useless, and fully expected that he was running away

from the belated fishermen, when he finally sailed down on them in the darkness of evening.

When he saw Mike Clancy running down, for a moment he thought it was Ned, and his heart sunk within him.

Then came the unexpected flash of a rifle, and the coming of dark figures from behind the boy, shoving the launch along, and even Darke's iron nerves were shaken for a moment, as he hastily changed the course of the schooner.

Then they heard Mike yelling to them to take him off, and Jim Clancy rushed to a dory with Baptiste Landry, without waiting for orders, and dashed to his brother's rescue as the Flash jibed.

They saw the Spanish boat sent into the water and coming slowly up, and heard Ned Norwood shouting to them, but Darke turned a deaf ear to all entreaties to wait, after the dory had hooked on her painter to the stern of the Flash.

He knew what he was about, he told them, and no pirates could steal his vessel.

"Twelve lives are worth more than one, boys," he said. "It's not my fault if the Jonah's found at last. Keep her steady and get up that staysail."

They kept on till the puffing of the tiny propeller could be heard no longer, when they turned to the north again, and Darke called all hands to the foot of the mainmast.

"Now, look here, boys," he said, to them, "we've fooled away enough time, bunting for men. We came out for fish. Ned Norwood's fallen into the hands of a lot of pirates, and their ship must be cruising round here, in which case we'll be taken, if we don't get out of this. We've come nigh a hundred miles out of the regular track of ships as it is, and I can't waste any more time. I'm going to beat up to the ground we left in the fog. We never had a better. That's all. Go forrad."

Mike Clancy stepped out:

"Av ye plase, sur—"

"I told you to go forrad," said Darke, sharply. "I've no time to waste."

There was some muttering among the crew, and the giant captain stepped forward and spoke in his sternest tones:

"Who's growling there? What's the matter?"

"The boys think we ought to hang round till it's daylight and resky Ned Norwood," said Perry, the Gloucester man, sullenly.

"How can you expect to do that?" asked Darke. "This schooner's not armed. We've not so much as a pistol aboard."

"Mike says there's only a few in the boat," was Perry's reply; "and there ain't no ship at all. She went down when we heard her firing a gun last night, skipper."

"Yes, sur," put in Mike, eagerly, "and they're only a poor lot of devils, anyway, sir; but they've got Ned Norwood, and it's my belief they'll ate him before they've done."

"Well, well," said Darke, soothingly, "I'll see about it in the morning, boys. In the mean time, go forrad. We can't find them tonight."

The men went forward, and the fishing-crew resumed the routine which had been so suddenly interrupted by the advent of the ice, while the Flash held on her course to the east and north, finally changing to northwest and west, till she had described a complete circuit, and Darke knew that she must be over the very ground on which he had cast anchor before.

The captain was up several times during the night to peer out over the sea, and when day broke he ordered soundings taken.

The lead gave seventy fathoms, with the same bottom on which they had anchored two days before, and as the sun rose the Flash cast her anchor a second time.

All round them the sea was ruffled by a cool and pleasant breeze from the north, but thin streaks of cloud were gathering over the sky in the south, and sweeping across it in slow and solemn procession, while, low down on the southern horizon, a thick haze was rising, in front of which was the yellow glare of an "ice-blink."

"Set the trawls," ordered Darke, as soon as the boat was anchored, and the dories were got out at once and swept away in the rays of a circle, a mile in diameter, to set the long lines of baited hooks.

Darke watched them, and saw that one of the dories, after setting its own trawl, rowed off a little further to something in the water. Scanning the place through the glass, he discovered that Jim Clancy and Baptiste were hauling in another trawl which seemed to be very full of fish. Half an hour later Jim came in with a dory loaded to the gunwale with huge halibut, and announced that he had found the very trawls set by his brother and Ned Norwood the night when they were lost.

The buoy flag had been broken off the buoy, as if both had been pressed under water by the ice, but every hook on the trawl was full, and nine out of ten of the fish were halibut, worth seven cents a pound on the dock at Gloucester.

The news, as Darke had foreseen it would, drove all memory of Ned Norwood out of the

heads of the crew for some time. They were too eager to reap the harvest before them to think of anything else.

The crews of the Gloucester fishing-vessels being paid by the value of their catch, the same as men in the whaling service, are more interested in fish than in humanity, and hand-lines were soon going over the side of the anchored Flash, with a success that fairly intoxicated all hands except Samson Darke.

He kept shifting his position from deck to cabin and back again, furtively watching the haze that was rising in the south, ice-blink and all, and longing for it to come closer.

He knew well that it was a northeast storm coming again as it had come before, to be followed by dense fog and ice, and he knew that when it once came, he would have an excuse for no longer seeking Ned Norwood.

All day long the hand-lines were going, and as the shades of evening approached the trawls were lifted and brought in, the dories being compelled to take two trips each before they could fully unload their lines of hooks.

And then as the evening fell over them, as Darke had foreseen, a dense mist drove in from the south, followed by a northeast gale, in which snow and sleet came down for a time, to end in a fog just as dense as that which had heralded the ice before and the captain called all hands to split fish and throw them into the ice-pens of the hold before the floe came back on them.

Already they had taken in nearly forty thousand pounds of halibut, and could they only remain there three days longer, they bid fair to take home the largest load ever brought back in a single trip.

The men ceased to talk about hunting for Ned Norwood in their eagerness for gain. Their only anxiety was to get their trawls baited and set again before it was too dark to do anything, and they kept the bells tolling while they went out and sunk their trawls in seventy fathoms of water, just as the ice came surging back to them on the return tide.

The Flash hove short on her anchor, and prepared to get out of the way of the great floe, but when it reached them they found that there were no icebergs near, and concluded to tie up to the ice for the night, as the safest place they could find in the fog. The men went below, setting only a single watchman, but Samson Darke kept going on deck at intervals for half the night.

When the morning came the fog thinned again and Darke was the first man on deck. About a quarter of a mile from the schooner lay a large iceberg dirty and stained, and on the top sat a huge polar bear, beside an inverted dory.

The captain started in a guilty way as he saw the dory and the bear.

"It's our boat," he muttered. "There's no doubt of it. He was left on the floe, and the bear has killed and eaten him. I'm safe."

He shouted down the hatchway, and the men came rushing on deck.

No sooner did they see the bear than Mike Clancy cried out:

"It's the white devil that stole our mate, captain. Let's go for him wid the axes."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLOODY BOAT.

A POLAR bear is not a nice animal to fight in his own home, but the crew of the Flash did not know exactly how much danger there was in him.

Darke, who had seen bears before in a Greenland sealing voyage, told them not to go too near the beast on the ice, for he was capable of annihilating the whole ship's company.

"I'll coax him where we can fight him," he told them, and he went down to his cabin for an ancient shot-gun, the only piece of artillery on board, which he brought up and discharged at the bear as the schooner neared the berg, which was now at the very edge of the floe.

The gun was loaded with duck-shot, and the captain fired at the bear's head, the distance being nearly a hundred yards.

The consequence was that a few shot struck Bruin on the nose with just force enough to irritate him, and he turned his head toward the schooner, and began to scramble down the berg, growling as he came.

The men laughed at his awkward figure, but Darke observed as he reloaded his old gun:

"You'll laugh the other side of your mouths if he ever gets aboard, boys. Get harpoons, Mike. He'll swim six knots an hour."

The bear got down to the edge of the floe, and dashed into the water, with perfect boldness, to swim out to the schooner, going so fast that he was close to her side before the captain had reloaded his gun.

There was a little gap in the ice between him and the Flash, and it showed his anger and boldness, that he swam over it instead of skirting the floe.

The crew of the Flash gathered with all sorts of weapons, harpoons, axes, lobster-spears, and one or two old pikes to repel the invader, while Darke rammed in a big charge of shot.

The bear came alongside and tried to climb up the Flash by hooking one of his long curved claws into the main channels, but such a battery of ax-blows fell on the huge paw that he withdrew it with a snarl of pain and rage, and swam round to the bowsprit.

Here he had easier work; for the bobstays under the bowsprit touched the water and in half a minute he had swung himself up and had his head over the rail.

"Keep back," shouted Samson Darke, as the men rushed to repel the assault. "Leave him to me."

He saw that the bear was a little puzzled at the forestay which happened to be right in front of his nose, and the captain stepped to the great pile of cable by the foremast, rested his old gun on the coils and sent a charge of duck-shot into the bear's face at less than six feet distance, extirpating both eyes and causing the animal to tumble over into the sea, howling dismally and struggling in a blind aimless way that carried it further from the ice every moment.

"There," cried Darke triumphantly, "now if any of you want his skin just go out in dories and kill him. He can't hurt any one now, if you don't let him get aboard."

But the men had had too much of polar-bears already to want to go after the monstrous beast, blind or not.

They watched him swimming out to sea, not knowing where he was going; and then they went on the ice to reclaim their lost dory. They found it half-way up one side of the old berg and came back dragging it to the schooner, but all looking pale and scared, headed by Mike Clancy.

"Captain, captain," said the honest fisherman, "there's been bloody murder done in that dory and poor Ned Norwood's been eaten by the baste."

Darke asked how they knew.

He could not restrain a certain look of content, not to say exultation, on his face, which he had hard work to tone down.

"How do you know it's Norwood?" he asked.

"We found his coat, sir, all torn to rags," said Mike, shaking, "covered with blood, and the bones of him left, all bloody."

Darke's face paled with anxiety.

"Are you sure, sure?" he asked. "How d'ye know they were his bones?"

Mike pointed to the berg.

"You can see for yourself, sir," he said.

Darke made no reply but leaped from the rail of the Flash on the ice and hurried to the foot of the berg.

The ice of the floe was getting rotten under the influence of the fog and he could trace the footsteps of the party that had preceded him.

Arrived at the foot of the berg he saw also the huge footprints of the bear and at the place where the dory had been lying he found a little bloody patch in which were strewed bones, pieces of flesh, and the remains of a heavy pilot coat, such as he knew Ned Norwood to have worn.

The garment had been clawed into shreds and lay around in fragments among the bones and blood.

Even Darke much as he hated Norwood in his jealousy could not avoid a shudder as he looked at the horrible spectacle.

"Poor fellow!" he muttered. "It's true. He must have run from those fellows and they chased him into the bear's mouth."

He remained staring down at the fragments in a spellbound fashion, till the sound of steps coming nearer roused him to mutter:

"They can't blame me now, surely."

The new-comer was Mike Clancy, who was sniveling with grief as he said:

"And 'twas himself was the good boy, skipper, and we'll never see him again. Bad luck to the haythen pirates, what were they doin' up here, anyway, at all, at all?"

Darke made no answer but to say:

"Go back to the Flash. What's done can't be helped."

When he got to the vessel he called the men to the mainmast and told them:

"Men, we need seek no further for Ned Norwood. He has been lost. I thought at first he had been carried off by those pirates, but as I never heard of any pirates on the Banks of Newfoundland, I can't believe those men were pirates. They probably belonged to some foreign navy, and their men didn't understand our language. Nevertheless, I'll put this to vote. If any of you think we ought to go back to Gloucester and give information to the revenue cutters that a strange craft is hovering round here, I'll put back at once. Those who wish to go on fishing, vote the other way. Those that want to go to Gloucester hold up their hands."

Only Mike Clancy raised his hand, and Jim growled to him:

"What d'ye want to be doin' that for? The man's dead, and that's all there is about it, while the fish are running like moss-bunkers, and we'll make fifty dollars a week, bedad."

Samson Darke smiled approvingly.

"I think you're right, boys. It's no use fretting for the dead, and the living must be cared for. We'll draw the trawls as soon as they

come in sight again from under this confounded ice."

But as the day went on the fog grew so thick they could not find the trawls, and were obliged to fish over the side again, with hand-lines till the tide carried them back.

Here their luck seemed to have forsaken them at last, for not a bite did they get for hours, and on sounding discovered that the ice had floated them during the night into twenty-five fathoms instead of seventy-five, with a rocky bottom where fish seemed to be scarce.

But for the fog they would have made sail and felt their way out, but they could tell from various indications that the fog was breaking up the ice, and they feared to run into some unknown peril.

Deep hollow cracks went running across the floes, while the bergs began to topple over, even in the midst of the field-ice and there was no wind to carry them out of the danger.

Darke began to be uneasy at the nearness of the large iceberg and warped the schooner along the floe to a position where he knew the nearest berg to be at least half a mile off. Then he waited for the tide to carry him back to his old ground, sounding every ten minutes.

At noon, as near as they could judge, the lead gave seventy-five fathoms with the well-known bottom, and almost at the same time the fish began to bite on the hand-lines in a manner that showed they had come to the old feeding-ground.

Darke cast off from the ice and let go his anchor, when the great floe slowly receded from the Flash and in an hour more they were in open water, the dories poking about in a circle looking for the buoys of the trawls.

A loud hail announced that they had found them at last and the business of hauling in commenced in earnest on the Flash.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FOG DEMONS.

THE rest of that day was consumed in bringing in trawls, cutting up fish and rebaiting the lines. When darkness closed in over the Flash, Darke rubbed his hands and said aloud:

"Ninety thousand pounds of halibut in the hold already, boys, and over six thousand dollars to share. One more day like this, and we'll go in with such a halibut fare as was never seen in Gloucester before in the same time."

They set the night watch in a fog denser than ever and the master sat up on the quarterdeck, smoking his pipe and listening to the low lapping of the wavelets on the schooner's counter as she rode to her anchor.

"The ice won't be in so early to-morrow," he reasoned with himself. "Maybe we'll have time to draw the trawls before we're driven away from the ground again."

He was buried in a pleasant reverie of profits to come, none the less pleasant that he felt he was rid of Ned Norwood for good, when it seemed to him he heard his name pronounced in a tone of voice like a distant hail.

"Darke!" came the far-off voice. "Samson Darke."

Darke started and looked round.

There was no one on deck but Baptiste Landry, who was leaning on the cable coils and keeping a lookout forward.

"Did you call me?" cried Darke.

Landry's figure turned in the fog.

"Me, capitaine? No. Vat for should I call?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Darke, in a testy tone. "Some one called out 'Darke' and then 'Samson Darke.' Was it you?"

"No, capitaine."

Landry left his post and came nearer to the other, asking in an agitated tone:

"You say some one called, capitaine?"

"Yes, I tell you. I heard it plainly."

"And it call you by name?"

"Yes. My Christian name too."

Baptiste held his hand to his ear, whispering: "Let us listen, capitaine. Maybe I hear too."

He went to the main shrouds, and peered out into the black fog, listening intently.

Presently came the voice again, this time hardly audible in the distance:

"Darke! Samson Darke!"

"Here!" shouted Darke, leaping up from the rail where he had been sitting. "Who are you?"

He listened for the answer and presently it came out of the fog in the same tone as before but not so distant.

"Ned Norwood!"

Darke started violently and Baptiste uttered a cry of horror and fell on his knees.

"Bon Dieu!" he groaned. "It is de fantome. It is Norwood come back."

As for Darke, he was more disturbed than he cared to let any one see, and it was to hide his real tremor that he roared back:

"Where are you?"

There was no reply for a moment and then Ned's voice answered:

"Coming! Coming! Coming home!"

The sweat burst out on Darke's forehead.

"What cursed hocus-pocus is this?" he cried fiercely.

"Where are you, Ned Norwood?"

There was no answer, but a low laugh which seemed to come from under the schooner's

counter, and Baptiste laid his hand on the arm of the excited man, saying in a low tone:

"Capitaine! Do you not know vat dat is?"

"Know what it is?" echoed Darke. "It's some trick some one's playing on board this vessel. Who's in the cabin?"

He made but one spring to the companion and peered into the cabin.

It was empty of all but sleepers, and the cabin windows were closely fastened.

He went down and peered into face after face but no one was shamming. He could tell that easily enough.

Then he came back on deck more puzzled than he cared to own, and took hold of Baptiste.

"You've been playing tricks on me," he cried.

"You're making those cries yourself."

"Me, capitaine!" cried Baptiste, aghast. "Vat for I play tricks on you? Do you not know vat is dat sound in de fog?"

"Yes," returned Darke, shaking him in his giant grasp, "it's you, you bound—"

"Darke! Darke! Samson Darke!"

The captain let go of Baptiste and staggered back to the traffail like a drunken man. There was no longer a possibility of doubt that the sound was not produced by any ventriloquism of Baptiste, for the Canadian's face had been close to Darke's, and he could have seen whether Landry was playing tricks. The cry came from the water and nowhere else, and the voice was Ned Norwood's.

Baptiste rearranged his disordered dress and said in a trembling tone:

"Now you see, capitaine. Ah, you don't know vat I know. Dat is vat ve call in Gaspe Bay *le Diable de Brouillard*."

"The what?" asked Samson vaguely.

"De devil, de Demon of de Fog. Ah, capitaine, it was not for notinz ve come out wid t'irteen men on board."

"What do you mean?" asked Samson in a low tone; his huge frame quivering for the first time with something like fear.

"De Fog Demon," said Baptiste in the same awe-stricken manner, "is de spirit of de dead sailor, run down in de mist. He come, he call out in de dark, and he lure de sheep to go dat way. Den de sheep strike de rock and go to de bottom. Dat voice ve bear is de demon. He take de voice of *notre ami*, Ned. He call. You vill see, capitaine, ve catch no more feesh, and ve 'ave misfortune before ve get home."

Darke tried to sneer in his old way.

"Ah, you're superstitious," he said. "There are no such things as demons. You Frenchmen have strong imaginations, that's—"

"Darke! Darke! Samson Darke!"

Again the voice interrupted him, and the captain turned and shouted:

"Where ar' you? Come aboard if you dare!"

The only reply was the same laugh they had heard before, and Baptiste whispered:

"It es ze demon; I tell you dat. You must not answer, or you vill go mad."

Darke went to the side and peered into the fog.

He was too much of a practical American to believe in ghosts, and he had made up his mind that if the voice in the fog was Ned Norwood's, Ned was alive.

But if so, where was he, and why was he hailing the schooner in this unearthly way?

"Norwood," he suddenly shouted over the water, "if you're alive, why don't you come on board? Where are you?"

This time there was no answer, but he heard theplash of an oar at no great distance. The sound seemed to break the spell under which he labored, for it satisfied him something was afloat in the water.

One of his own dories was towing astern, and he drew it alongside and was about to step in when Baptiste caught hold of him, saying with great earnestness:

"Capitaine, do not go. *C'est le Diable du Brouillard*—it is ze Fog Demon. He try to entice you to drown. Do not go."

Darke shook off his hand, and his fierce eyes glared as he said:

"Mind your own business. Samson Darke flinches from neither man nor devil. I'm going to find out what that is in the fog."

He took an oar and sculled away the light dory in the direction in which he had last heard the splash of the other oar, calling out:

"Keep the bell sounding till I come back."

Baptiste ran to the bell and began to ring it with all his might, while Darke sculled on into the fog, peering round him as he went but seeing nothing.

Once he thought he heard the dip of the other oar, and ceased sculling to call:

"Norwood! Where are you?"

But there was no answer, and presently the tinkle of the Flash's bell became so distant that even Darke began to feel nervous and retraced his course to the vessel, where he found the crew on deck in a state of great excitement, Baptiste Landry having roused them all up to tell them the story of the Fog Demon and how the captain had gone after it.

They seemed to be much relieved at his return all safe, and welcomed him heartily.

The bell was stopped, and they listened atten-

tively, but could hear nothing more, till the heaving of the water, in long, smooth, oily swells, told them that the ice was approaching them once more and melting fast.

Then they hove short on the anchor and got ready to trip as soon as the tide brought the floe upon them.

When it did, they discovered that it had broken into several large cakes; that the bergs had broken off; and that the fog was thinning so fast that they could see the moon, like a dull red ball in the sky, and beheld the icebergs, now much smaller in number, sailing by on either side, in advance of the field-ice, through which broad black lanes had opened in several places.

Darke saw that he might be able to keep his post if he could work his schooner into one of these open lanes. Fortune favoring him, he did so, and had the satisfaction of seeing all the ice float by him at long range, while the Flash rode quietly at her cable in seventy-five fathoms of water.

When morning dawned the fog was thicker than it had been at night, but, the light being more powerful, Darke distinguished the same iceberg by which he had found the bloody dory, and there it lay close to the Flash, with the same dark red patch and the tattered remnants of a fisher's coat, as if to remind him that he must have seen a ghost that night, for that Ned Norwood was surely dead.

Darke rubbed his eyes like one dazed.

"Is that thing never to vanish?" he muttered to himself staring at the berg. "I'll go and examine it. Surely there must be some mistake. Dead men cannot call to living ones."

He got into a dory and sculled over to the foot of the berg. It had broken loose from the floe in the night and had turned half over. The dark patch, which had been on the top, was now not far from the water's edge, and Darke was able to examine it closely.

He even stepped ashore and picked up the tatters of Norwood's pilot coat.

Then he picked up one of the bones and muttered to himself:

"Fool that I was to be frightened! The man is not dead; that's all. They are seal's bones. But how comes the coat to be torn? Never mind. It will serve as well as another story. Ned Norwood, if you are not dead, you soon will be, if you're anywhere in this ice. I'll teach you to come haunting me."

He searched the rags of the fisherman's coat and discovered that it was only bloody in one place, where it had lain in the seal's blood, for seal's blood it was.

If the bear had torn it, no living man had been inside of it, and Darke became satisfied of this, after a careful examination.

What was it, then, which made him carefully take the coat and roll it into a ball to throw it into the water? Did he fear some one else might make the same discovery as himself?

It is hard to say. All that is certain is that he did it, and rowed back to the Flash, not noticed by his sleeping men, wearied with watching.

CHAPTER XV.

ALICE.

ALICE NELSON was sitting at the window, a week after the Flash went to sea, when she heard her father down-stairs calling:

"Alice! Alice!" in a peremptory tone.

She went down wondering what could be the matter, and found him looking very grave and stern, as he walked up and down the parlor.

The judge had always been a strict father but not an unkind one; and Alice was all the more in awe of him, because she loved him dearly.

"What is it, father?" she asked timidly; for she saw he was not a little angry from the look of his face, which was pale, with compressed lips and bent brows.

"Alice," said her father sternly, "I have heard something to day I never expected to hear."

Alice changed color and glanced up in a scared way at the old man, who went on with trembling voice:

"I thought that my only daughter, whom I brought up from the time when she was left, a motherless infant, to my care, had some love, some trust in her father. I thought that she would listen to my wishes, would respect my opinions, would believe I meant everything for the best, when I allowed or forbade her anything."

He paused as if for an answer, and eyed her in such a way that she tried to speak, but could only whisper in a small voice.

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, sir?" he echoed with some scorn. "It is all very well to say, yes, sir; but what have you done? Did I not forbid that young Norwood my house, when he deliberately chose to give up all his prospects in life and throw away all the results of his education to become a common fisherman before the mast? Did I or did I not?"

"Yes, sir," she whispered, "but—"

"But what, Alice? Speak out," he said in his sternest tones.

"But you had already consented to our en-

gagement," she murmured, with her eyes on the floor; "and it wasn't fair, Ned said."

"Ned said!" echoed her father, in his most sarcastic tones. "Ned said. So it came to that at once. You must take his opinion against mine, must you? Well, I suppose you thought that I was sure to die, sooner or later, and if I was good for nothing else I was good to leave some money behind me, on which Ned could live in idleness?"

Alice lifted her eyes from the floor with more spirit than she had yet shown.

"We thought no such thing, sir," she said. "You ought to know me better than that. And as for Ned, if he had wanted to live in idleness, he would not be a fisherman."

The judge listened without relaxing his stern face, and broke out angrily:

"Yes, indeed, a common fisherman, smelling of fish-oil, and glad to get an average of ten dollars a week, when you might marry men worth their thousands, whose wages he is glad to accept. And so you have been holding clandestine meetings with this young spark, I hear, whenever I've been away in Boston."

Alice looked up again.

"Not clandestine, sir. I've never met Ned, save in company with other people at evening parties, and so on."

"Evening parties?" echoed Judge Mason, with intense scorn. "Did he come to them in his sea-boots, I wonder? Where were these fine evening parties?"

"At Mrs. Pew's, for one, sir; Mrs. Tarr's, Mrs. Mansfield's, and several others," returned Alice, not without a slight sense of triumph, for she knew she was naming the best people of the town.

The judge looked amazed.

"What, do you mean to tell me those people receive young Norwood, since he has gone before the mast?" he cried.

Alice smiled rather proudly.

"I refer you to them all, sir."

The judge took a turn up and down the room before he spoke again, and Alice saw that he staggered.

When he resumed, it was to say:

"Well, they're very foolish people, and I shall tell them so. Romance is all very pretty, but it is no foundation for married life. What has that young man to offer you?"

"His love and a home," said Alice in a low voice. "It's not much, but I could willingly slave for Ned."

"You'll have to slave a long time," said the judge sarcastically, "before you get any sort of a home. Why, the man's a beggar!"

Alice made no reply, and the judge looked out of the window over the bay, drumming on the sash in a thoughtful mood.

Alice plucked up courage to ask:

"Who told you that I met Ned clandestinely?"

"Never you mind," was the answer. "It was the truth and that's enough. You went to places on purpose to meet him without my consent. The person who told me did right."

"I suppose it was Samson Darke then," said Alice at a venture, and not having any idea that the Flash had returned.

Her father started slightly and turned round.

"Well, what if it was?" he asked.

Alice could not believe her ears.

"Was it he?" she asked. "Has he come back from sea already?"

Her breast was heaving, her eyes sparkling, and her father noticed her excitement and asked:

"Hoity toity, what's this? What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing, sir," said Alice demurely; "only—only—"

"Only what?" he snapped.

"Only Ned's in the Flash," she said, "and he's going to command the Flirt, next time he goes out. He's not quite a beggar, sir."

The judge shrugged his shoulders. He had got over his first burst of temper, and was cogitating over a trip to Boston.

"Just to take the nonsense out of the child," he said, to himself.

"No, he's not quite a beggar," he replied, in a rather indifferent way. "I suppose he'll make his way in time, but all the same, till he's made it, I don't choose to have your name mixed up with his. He ought to have more honor than to hang round my house after I've forbid it. He might be here to day if he hadn't been too—too—"

"Independent, sir," said Alice, quietly. "He knew you didn't really want a clerk, and he would have been living on charity, so he chose to earn his bread honestly and every one honors him for it."

She had never in her life felt so brave in speaking up for Ned as she did at that moment. Something seemed to spur her on to his defense and her words made some impression on the old judge for he said hurriedly:

"Oh, that's all right. I don't object to that. Independence is all right of course; but I won't have him coming after you. I've other intentions for you."

Alice looked at him nervously.

It was the first time he had ever spoken openly of such a thing.

"What other intentions, sir?" she asked.

"I want you to think seriously of marrying Captain Samson Darke," said the judge, in his most decided way, speaking loud and fast, to overbear any possible interruption. "I want to have you look at marriage in a rational light, not in a halo of silly and undutiful romance. Captain Darke is a wealthy, one of the wealthiest men in this town, and he has risen from nothing to be what he is. With all his outward roughness he is a man of sterling good sense and practical education. Like an honorable gentleman he has spoken to me first, and he is none of your back-door suitors—"

"No," interrupted Alice, stung into reply. "He's a back-door eavesdropper and tale-bearer, instead and I hate him."

The judge stopped, aghast. He could not have been more amazed if his daughter had thrown a jug at his head.

For gentle Alice Mason to interrupt her father and use violent language about any one was an unheard-of thing, and as soon as she had done it, she burst into tears and began to sob in self-defense. Judge Mason looked at her narrowly, and then began in his most sarcastic way:

"Upon my word! Well, Alice, I must say that your fisherman lover has taught you a singular style of manners. I don't wonder you're rude to me. That's natural. I'm only your father, and fathers don't amount to much till they're dead, and not then, unless they leave plenty behind them. But I want you to understand one thing, Captain Darke is not a person to be insulted by a child like you, as an eavesdropper. The fact is, he is nothing of the sort."

"Then how did you know I was with Ned?" asked Alice, sobbing. "He must have told you."

"He did, but only by accident," answered the judge earnestly. "Come, you must be just to this gentleman, whose only fault is being foolishly fond of you. Let me tell you how it happened. I met him this morning, coming from the fish warehouse, dressed in his shore clothes, as fine a looking fellow as ever I saw, and he told me that he got in last night, after making, in only five days, the largest halibut fare ever sent into Gloucester, netting eight thousand dollars, to divide with his crew. I asked him how he hit on such a good ground, and he told me, with a laugh, that was his secret, and that he hoped to take a good many thousand dollars out of that hole before the summer was over. Then it was that he suddenly began to speak about you, and asked my permission to pay his addresses to my daughter. I told him he had that, but that I could not constrain your affections in any way. I even told him about your fancy for Ned Norwood, and he spoke of Ned in the kindest way, and sighed as he said that he had noticed you together a good deal, but had no idea that Ned had any serious intentions."

"Did he say that?" asked Alice, eagerly.

"Certainly. Then I questioned him, and it all came out, very reluctantly on his part, I assure you, but enough to give me a clew to the truth."

Alice curled her lip.

"Then it's just as I thought. He did tell tales. I hate him, father. I tell you I hate him. If he were the last man in the world I would not marry him. Not to get—"

"Ting! tang!"

The sharp ring of the door-bell interrupted the colloquy at this interesting point, and the judge turned rather red as he went to the door himself.

In New England, where servants are scarce, and housekeepers particular, it is not at all uncommon for people of means to do their own housework, and the sole domestic at the Mason domicile was the black cook in the kitchen, who never answered the bell when the family was at home.

"Don't you go up-stairs till I come back," said Judge Mason, as he went to the door, and very soon she heard him talking in a low voice to some one, when heavy steps came across the hall and into the parlor.

Then Alice looked up and saw the tall and massive figure of Samson Darke, no longer dressed in rough fishing-clothes, but attired with the faultless elegance of a Boston man—and Bostonians are renowned for being the best-dressed men in the Union—and looking undeniably handsome, not to say grand.

Samson Darke at sea was a viking in his brawn and vigor; Samson on land looked like a leader of men, born to the purple. His grand physique, revealed by a closely-buttoned frock, his flowing beard and curly hair, his regularly chiseled face, fierce blue eyes and deep lionine voice, would have attracted attention in any assembly, and even Alice Mason, as she looked up, could not help thinking:

"What a grand-looking fellow he is!"

Then the thought came into her mind:

"But how mean! To think that a man like that should try to undermine poor, friendless Ned with my father."

The judge came forward with Darke.

"Captain Darke has called, Alice, to see you. I hope you will make matters pleasant to him,

for he is a great friend of mine. I am going to the office to write a letter. Captain Darke will stay to dinner."

With this very pointed hint, the judge took his departure, to Alice's great dismay, and she was left alone with the giant, who, on his part, bowed with an ease she had never seen in him before, and observed in his deep base voice:

"The judge insisted, Miss Alice, and would take no excuse. I hope I don't discommode ye in the house."

He spoke slowly, choosing his words with care, as he always did ashore, without a trace of sea slang.

Alice replied coldly:

"Any friend of my father's has a right in his house, I presume."

Then she went and sat down at a table and looked toward the door as her father went out, thinking:

"How shall I get rid of this man? And Ned's ashore and I can't go to see him."

Samson Darke watched her keenly and allowed a deep silence to settle on the room for more than a minute, when she looked up in desperation, saying:

"I—I hear you had—a very favorable voyage, captain."

Darke shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, I did. But I never talk shop on shore, Miss Alice. I've something to tell ye."

Immediately she fixed her eyes on his in a chilling, repellent way.

She hoped that he would offer himself at once, that she might have the pleasure of giving him a rebuff, to send him away for good.

"Well, sir, what is it?" she asked.

Darke put his hand into his pocket, and watched her furtively as he said:

"Miss Alice, ye'll remember that the day I left ye last I was rude and angry to ye. I thought I had a right to be. I thought that a young man, who shall be nameless, was playing a dishonorable part to ye and in especial was wronging the judge, your father. I said things I had no right to say and I ask your pardon."

Alice was a little surprised, but she could do no less than bow her head and say:

"Well, captain, you were rude, but since you apologize, I'll try to forget it."

"I don't ask ye to forget it," returned Darke, steadily. "Part of it I mean to-day. I told ye then, that before Ned Norwood should take ye from me for good, there would be a fight between us. I meant that then, but I don't mean it now. I've learned something since then that alters the whole case."

Alice had changed color as he spoke and looked at him in a frightened way.

"What do you mean?" she faltered.

"Alice Mason," said Darke slowly, and as he spoke he drew from his pocket a large envelope. "I didn't tell the judge what I know, or 'twould have been a bad time for you. I hold here in my hand the letter that shows ye were married to Ned Norwood the day before I left ye, and therefore I've no further call to interfere between ye. Here's the letter."

Alice had turned as white as a sheet as he spoke. This was by no means what she had expected. She took the packet in a mechanical way, and asked in a dull monotonous tone:

"How did you get this? Did you steal it from him?"

Darke rose quietly from his seat and looked down at her in a quiet, dignified manner, as if he was wounded at the question.

"Alice Norwood," said he, "but for what I know, which you do not know, I should be angry. But my poor girl, I've no heart to be angry now. I did not steal that; but I took it from Ned Norwood's bag. It was my right as captain to look over his effects, after his disappearance—"

In a moment Alice was on her feet, with a shrill scream.

"Disappearance!" she cried. "Oh, Darke, in God's name tell me you don't mean it. There has been a storm. He has been hurt, but not lost. Don't say he's lost. Dear good Captain Darke, I've been very rude to you. I beg your pardon. But don't kill me. Don't tell me Ned's gone. Don't, don't, don't!"

She had fallen on her knees and had hold of the big man's hand, looking up at him with a singular expression of agony on her features that he only half understood.

"Don't say he's dead," she pleaded, "or I shall die too. Oh, you don't know all."

Samson laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Bear up, my lass," he said slowly. "Ned's dead!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MISSING PROOFS.

AND the moment he said "Ned's dead," Alice Norwood dropped on the floor in a dead faint, while a spasm crossed Darke's iron features, and he muttered:

"She'll get over it; they all get over it. Better get it done quick. Poor child, poor child!"

He picked her up and laid her on the sofa, then went and sat down to watch her.

He noticed that she had dropped on the floor the envelope containing the letter. He had found it in Norwood's bag, which he had ex-

amined after it became evident that the young man was not coming back to the Flash. The discovery had not at first surprised him, for Ned had already confessed the marriage, but he put away the paper in his own pocket, feeling the advantage it would give him in future operations.

Now he picked it up from the floor and put it back in his breast, while Alice lay on the sofa, white and still.

Had Samson been an ordinary man, he would have been frightened by the fainting-fit, but he had been in too many parts of the world, and had seen too much of women, as well as men, not to know that the best way to cure a fainting-fit is to leave it alone.

In the course of a few minutes the girl gave a deep sigh and opened her eyes, when Samson Darke quietly withdrew to the back room, where she could not see him, and awaited developments.

Presently Alice rose on her elbow and looked round in a bewildered way.

"What's the matter?" she murmured. "I thought—I thought—"

The captain of the Flash coughed slightly, and she started up, looked at him, and cried in agitated tones:

"I remember—oh, tell me—have I—have I said anything?"

She seemed to be much frightened at something, and Darke came to her at once, saying, soothingly:

"No, no, ye said nothing—nothing. Fear not, Alice Norwood. Your secret is safe in my hands. None shall know it."

The color rushed over her face again, and she stammered in a low voice:

"Oh, what must you think of me?"

"Think of ye?" echoed Samson cheerily. "I think you're the best girl in Gloucester, Alice Norwood, and any man that says a word against ye will have to deal with Samson Darke."

"No, no, it's not that," she said hurriedly. "I don't mean that, but—"

Here she suddenly began to search for the paper she had dropped, and her face took an appearance of great alarm.

"Where is it?" she gasped. "Oh, I shall be ruined, if it's not found."

"What?" asked Samson coolly.

"My—my—the paper you gave me," she answered hurriedly her color deepening. "I had it. Did I faint? What has happened?"

Samson looked at her with apparent surprise.

"What paper d'ye mean?" he asked. "I gave ye no paper but a letter."

Alice put both hands to her head and stared at him, as if she could not believe her ears.

"What?" she said. "Am I going mad? What did you tell me? Repeat it, please."

"I told ye," said Samson quietly, "that Ned Norwood was drowned. I was going to tell ye more, but ye fainted away."

"But you gave me a paper," persisted Alice more firmly. "It was the certificate of my marriage to Ned. He had it. Where is it?"

Samson looked at her narrowly.

"I fear that the shock has affected your memory, Alice. I gave ye a paper, true, but it was not that. I'll repeat the story and ye shall know all. When I went to the Flash, Ned Norwood was aboard. He went to the Banks with us and out in a dory with another man to set a trawl. While they were out the fog came down and the night with it, and they were lost in the dark—"

"And you never searched for them?" asked Alice in a half-whisper.

Samson Darke frowned slightly.

"We searched for them, as ye'll hear. I know ye hate me, Alice, but ye've no reason to do so, as ye'll find out before long."

Alice made a deprecating movement.

"I beg your pardon; I'm not well. Please forgive me, captain. Tell me all. I seem to be stupid and confused."

"I'll tell ye all; I've nothing to hide," answered Samson in his frankest manner. "They were lost in the fog, and we were nearly run down by a steamer soon afterward, so that we were unable to do anything more till morning. We had even lost the direction in which they went. During the night a great field of ice came down with the tide, and we were obliged to get up the anchor and make sail to avoid being crushed. In the light of morning the fog cleared off, and we began the search and kept it up all that day. We judged the two men must be on the ice somewhere. That night we came on one of them, but Ned Norwood was not found."

"How—how did you find him?" interrupted the girl; "the man, I mean. Who was he?"

"His name was Clancy; and when we saw him, he was being chased by a white bear. We managed to beat the beast off and save the man, but he told us that Norwood was still on the ice. The next day we found the dory in which the two had set out, with blood all over it; and Ned's fishing-coat lay beside it under the bear, who had killed the poor fellow, from the indications, beyond a doubt."

Alice shuddered violently, and turned deadly pale as he spoke; but Samson pursued:

"Don't faint again, Alice—it's useless. Keep control of yourself. Ned's gone, and it can't be helped. You are alive, and you know what your future will be if this affair with Ned Norwood is not hushed up—"

"Hushed up!" echoed Alice indignantly. "No, no, there is nothing to be hushed up now. It is a punishment to me for not telling the truth before. Oh, why was I so foolish as to hide my marriage with Ned? I thought he would come back, and yet, and yet—"

She burst into tears and Darke allowed her to sob some time before he spoke.

"You asked for a paper," he said. "It dropped from your hand when you fainted. Here it is, but it is not the certificate you think. It is only a letter to your father, which I found in Ned's bag."

He handed her the envelope he had given her before, and Alice looked at it stupidly.

"Why, I thought—I thought you said—" she stammered.

"You thought I said I had the marriage paper. No, that letter is unsealed, as you see, and of course I read it."

Alice opened it and read the following:

"JUDGE MASON:—

"SIR:—By this time you will learn that your daughter, who has left your house with me, has done so as my wife. We were married on the day before the Flash left on her last voyage to the Banks; but at Alice's earnest entreaty I consented to allow the marriage to remain a secret till I came back from that trip. Now that I am in charge of the schooner Flirt, I feel amply able to support my wife, and ask no favors of any one. Remember, sir, that you once consented to our engagement, and you had no right to break it off because I met with unmerited misfortune. We shall always regard you with sincere affection; but it rests with you to say what shall be our relations in future.

"Yours respectfully,
EDWARD NORWOOD."

Alice looked at him stupidly.

"But you said—you said—"

"I said that I had found out you were married," replied Samson quietly. "That letter was evidently written to be dispatched after Ned got here. It rests with you to say whether it shall be. It is not possible, is it, that you have not got your certificate in your own possession, Alice?"

Alice looked at him in a helpless, dazed manner, as she said:

"Ned had it. I was a coward. I didn't dare to keep it. And now it's gone. Oh my God, what shall I do, what shall I do?"

She began to rock to and fro on the sofa, moaning in a low tone, while Darke's eyes wore a singular light as he watched her.

"Then have ye no means of proving your marriage?" he asked, in a hard, cold way.

Alice stopped moaning and looked at him drearily as she answered:

"None, none. Oh Darke, I've been a wicked fool and I'm being punished for it. You have your revenge now."

She seemed not to mind what she said to him, and he questioned more closely.

"Do ye mind the minister that married ye, Alice Mason?" he asked.

She caught the different name, and threw up her head proudly.

"My name is Alice Norwood," she said to him. "You know that from that letter."

Samson shrugged his shoulders.

"The letter is nothing. It was meant to be delivered when he came back; but he has not come back. It's important that ye should know the name of the minister. He was a Gloucester man, perhaps?"

Alice clasped her hands on her knee, and rocked to and fro moaning:

"Oh my God, what shall I do? what shall I do? Who could have thought of this?"

Darke laid his hand on her arm.

"Stop that, Alice. I see there's more in this than I thought. Before we go any further tell me, d'ye think I'm your friend or your foe?"

Alice shuddered and moaned out:

"I don't know, I don't know. I suppose you think you love me. Oh Ned, Ned, my poor boy, where are you now? Oh my God! what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"I'll tell ye what to do," said Samson in a low voice. "Confide in me wholly. Tell me the name of the minister."

Alice made a gesture of despair.

"I don't know," she murmured. "It was in Boston; a man I never saw before. I don't even know the street he lives in. It was at night; I was frightened half to death, and we had to get back to Gloucester before morning. I should know his face; but that's all. But it's no use, it's no use. I couldn't find him. I'm ruined, disgraced forever."

She began to rock and moan again, while Samson kept his eyes fixed on her in a way that showed his triumph.

At last he said in a low tone:

"Ye needn't be disgraced at all, Alice Norwood."

"Oh, how can I escape it?" she moaned. "Oh Ned, Ned, why did you persuade me against my will? We might have waited. Oh, I might have known no good could come of a child disobeying her parent."

Samson Darke interrupted her.

"Ye say right, Alice. Yet ye do it now. Your father has given his consent that I should marry ye, and ye will not listen to me—"

"Oh, don't, don't talk of marriage," said she, with a strong shudder. "Do you not know I'm his widow?"

"Ay," replied Samson, in his deep voice. "I know it well; but no one else will. Hear me, Alice Norwood. Before ever ye saw that boy, Ned, I knew and loved ye. He was young and handsome, I, a rough sailor. I hated him because he took ye from me. Now see in what a plight he has left ye. A widow, indeed. Yes, but what will the folks of Gloucester call ye? A widow bewitched. Ye can prove nothing. Ye don't even know the minister that ye claim married ye. I am the only man in Gloucester that will believe ye. Your own father wouldn't."

Alice shuddered and buried her face in her hands. Too well she knew that he was telling the truth to her.

"Now," pursued Samson, "there's only one way to hush all this up and make the world think that happened which did not happen. Ye must marry me forthwith."

As he spoke he rose up and looked down on her with his fierce eyes repeating:

"Ye must marry me forthwith. I know ye hate me. I care not for it. I know ye love Ned Norwood. I care not for that. I'll make ye love me, Alice Mason. I'll make ye. Yes, the day shall come when ye'll bless me for saving ye from the man that left ye in your trouble to disgrace. Ye must marry me."

They heard a step on the front door and the noise of a latch-key in the lock and Alice uttered a faint cry:

"For God's sake, don't tell him. Don't. He'll kill me. Don't—"

"Will ye marry me then?" asked Samson in his coldest, hardest tone. "Which is it to be, peace or war? Will ye marry me?"

Alice seemed as if she was about to faint again, but recovered herself by a violent effort, and her eyes flashed as she said:

"Yes."

In a half-whisper she added:

"But I shall hate you all my life long."

Samson Darke laughed aloud.

"Be it so. You think so. I'll make you love me before I've done."

The judge opened the door and walked in, to be greeted by Samson saying:

"Miss Alice has consented to marry me, sir, and has set the day for next Monday."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LETTER.

The judge turned to Alice with his face in a half incredulous smile.

"Is this true, Alice?" he asked.

"He says so," she replied in a monotonous way.

"It makes no difference, I suppose. Monday will do as well as another day. Will you excuse me a few moments?"

She went out of the room and Samson observed to the judge:

"Don't notice her. It's natural she should be a little disturbed. I'm much older than she is. She will come round all right. You see the fact is she was very fond of poor Norwood and we must give her time to get over it."

"Over what?" asked Mason in a tone of some wonder. "Has anything happened to him?"

"Didn't I tell you?" asked Darke, innocently.

"No. You told me nothing, except that you had seen them together after I forbade it."

"Oh, well," said Samson, coolly. "He's dead."

"Dead!"

"Yes, dead. Drowned."

The judge uttered an exclamation of wonder not unmixed with sorrow.

"Poor boy! What a pity! And I thought that he had a bright future before him! How did it happen, Darke?"

"He went out in a dory in the fog, was lost, and we found his coat on an ice-floe after the fog cleared."

"Then he couldn't have been drowned," the judge objected.

"Did I say drowned? I was wrong. The fact is I don't like to say exactly how he was killed, judge."

"Why not? Surely you can tell me."

"Well, you know when the ice comes down from Greenland in large masses it is not uncommon to find on it white bears that have been carried off on bergs."

The judge turned pale and shuddered as he said in a low tone:

"Surely you don't mean—"

Darke nodded gravely.

"I fear so. We shot the beast afterward, but it was too late to save Ned."

The judge turned away and went thoughtfully to the window.

Presently he said to Darke:

"Poor girl! It's strange. How could you end in persuading her to marry you, if she was really fond of Norwood? I can't quite make it out. It's not natural."

Samson had been waiting for that question, and his wits never failed him.

"I think Alice is very proud, sir."

"Proud? What has that to do with it?"

"I think she's afraid people might say she was pining for a lover, and marries me to show she does not."

"Humph!" observed Mason. "That's no sort of a reason."

"Ladies have no reason," said Samson, in a shrewd manner. "You can't judge them by our standard. Besides, what difference does it make if I'm satisfied? I know she doesn't like me, but I'll make her do so after we're married, judge. I had to strike while the iron was hot, or I might never have got her. And now I'll tell you what it is. I won't stop to dinner here. Give her time to get over her first flush of grief, and don't speak to her about Ned Norwood whatever you do. Leave it all to me, but be ready to come to church next Monday."

The judge seemed to be somewhat bewildered as he promised, but he agreed to leave his daughter alone, and Samson Darke left the house, his head high in the air, saying to himself as he strode along:

"I have her now. She can't go back on her word, and I'll hold her to it."

Then, as he went, the thought came:

"But what if Ned Norwood should come back?"

The answer came immediately:

"He'll find me married to Alice, and what can he do? Will he try to take her from me and reclaim her in the face of all the scandal it would cause? No, he will not, or I don't know the man. He'll think she's deserted him and away he'll go to the devil. I'm clear of him any way. Be ites, to take her from me is to stain her name forever. He won't do that. Bigamy is an ugly crime to accuse a woman of, and he's just fool enough to let her go."

He went home to attend to his business, and for the rest of the week announced everywhere the fact of his approaching marriage.

His schooners were decked with flags and he had made up his mind to detain them all in port till the ceremony was performed, and then to sail for the fishing-ground he had discovered on his previous voyage and to make all he could from it by anchoring the whole fleet at once there, before any one else found it out.

If the fish held out as he expected, he could net between two and three thousand dollars clear profit on each schooner within one week, and he had seven of them.

He had cautioned his own crew against telling any one the locality on which they had fallen, and they were quite willing to obey the injunction on which depended profit for themselves.

The days wore on, and the eventful Monday came; which was to witness the culmination of Samson Darke's fortune for good or evil.

On that morning for the first time he began to feel compunction of conscience as he looked at Alice Norwood's face.

It was haggard and drawn, pale as death, with dark circles round the eyes, and she had dressed for the ceremony in black silk when he came to the house to see her, for the first time since his offer.

Judge Mason looked gloomy and fidgety and bustled round the room, saying:

"Now, Alice, Alice, this is really too bad. Who ever heard of a bride in black?"

"Who ever heard of a bride like me?" she answered, stolidly. "Black's the fit color for this day, father. I've married to please you only."

Samson tried to put a light face on it.

"Never mind," he said to the judge. "Black or white 'tis all the same to me, so long as I get her. I'm ready now, as soon as Mr. Jenkins comes."

Mr. Jenkins was the minister.

At that very moment came a ring at the bell and Darke exclaimed eagerly.

"That's Mr. Jenkins. Let me go to the door."

The house was nearly empty of people, for Alice had made it a condition to her father that the ceremony should be strictly private.

Besides themselves the only relatives present were some of Darke's kinsfolk and the Boston law partner of Judge Mason, who was down in the basement, smoking a cigar and telling one of Darke's people:

"More like a funeral than a wedding. Never saw such a set. Do they do things this way in Gloucester, all the time?"

So Samson had no difficulty in going to the door in a nervous, excited way; for he began to feel very uneasy and to wonder in his own mind whether it was possible for him to get through with the marriage without any hitch.

He opened the door expecting to confront the Presbyterian clergyman, and beheld only the letter carrier, who held out some letters and then turned away.

What was it made Darke scan the back of these letters so carefully?

Nothing but his uneasy conscience.

There were five of them: three to the judge, one to Miss Alice Mason, the other—could it be yes it was:

"MRS. ALICE NORWOOD,
"Care Judge Mason,
"GLOUCESTER, MASS."

For one moment Samson Darke's heart leaped up into his throat, the next he sent the fatal letter up his sleeve and went in to say to the judge with affected laughter:

"Disappointed again. Only the postman with letters. One for Miss Alice Mason, the last she'll ever get I hope. Permit me, Mrs. Darke that is to be."

She gave him a singular, scornful look, and curled her lip as she said:

"Till I bear that name, I am Alice Mason to you, sir."

Darke flashed a glance at her that made her change color, and retorted:

"Indeed I think not. To others, perhaps, but to me you bear a different name."

"Yes, yes, of course," said the judge, hurriedly. "All nonsense to be calling her Miss Mason, now. Excuse me a moment, while I read these letters."

Samson bowed, and was satisfied to see that Alice avoided his look, as he whispered:

"Shall I call you Mrs. Norwood before them all?"

She pretended not to hear him, and opened her own letter without an apology, while he, on his part, withdrew out of observation and scanned the letter he had hidden up his sleeve in the hall.

It was only too true.

The address was "Mrs. Alice Norwood," beyond a doubt, and the postmark was "Havana."

He didn't know the writing, but he guessed it. He remembered the foreign sailors that had been on the ice, and knew that only one man in the world besides himself knew that Alice had married Norwood.

That man was Norwood himself and there was no longer the shadow of a doubt that he was alive; that he was probably coming back, that all must be discovered soon.

Most men would have given up the game under such circumstances; not so Darke.

He excused himself from the house under the pretext of having forgotten something, and hurried off to his own house where he tore open the letter, and uttered a deep curse as the first lines met his eye:

"My darling wife!"

For a moment he turned white as a sheet and his eyes glared like those of a hungry wolf.

Then he laughed to himself.

"When you see your darling wife again she'll be some one else's darling wife," he muttered to himself.

It cost him considerable effort so far to calm himself as to read the letter through, but the contents more than repaid him.

The letter was dated:

"HAVANA, May 4th, 18—.

"MY DARLING WIFE:—
"By the best luck in the world the steamer goes as I enter the harbor, and I send this letter to save you, I hope, from a world of grief.

"God grant the Flash has not got in before this comes. I don't want to think too badly of Samson Darke, but I can't help seeing that if he had been anxious to rescue me I should not be away from you now.

"I was very nearly being killed as it was, but I have escaped, thanks to my wonderful luck, and have acquired a position here which will end in making my fortune. What it is I cannot tell you yet, in justice to others; but this I will say: if all goes well I shall be able to come back to Gloucester a richer man than any in that town. Therefore, darling, have no further hesitation. Proclaim our marriage to your father, and tell him that by the next mail I shall send him substantial proof that Ned Norwood is neither a fortune-hunter nor a pauper.

"In great haste,
"Your affectionate husband,
"EDWARD NORWOOD."

Darke put down the letter and considered.

"It must all come out unless I can intercept the second letter. And even then, he will be sure to write again. It cannot be hidden. I was a fool when I had him not to have killed him at once. Why did I not? It must have been him in the fog calling me. But what was he about? I don't understand it all. Only one thing I'm certain of, that this shall not interfere with my wedding."

He deliberately tore up the letter into small strips, which he burned in the empty stove, and then strode off to Judge Mason's house, with a step as firm as if he had never thought of committing a crime.

He found the little company in the parlor with the minister ready to perform the ceremony, while Alice, pale and listless, eyed him from the depths of a lounging chair as he came in, with a strange, despairing look which every one noticed.

Then as the company rose to receive him he went to Alice and offered his hand, saying:

"It is time, Alice, if you are ready?"

She rose slowly.

"Can I speak with you alone, one moment, only one moment?" she said in a low voice, but one which was heard by all in the room.

Darke bit his lips.

He knew that she was about to plead for

mercy—to beg delay. She was breaking down as the time came and dared not face the ceremony. But he could not refuse the request, proffered before so many people.

"Certainly," he said.

Then he led the way into the back parlor just out of ear-shot.

She was about to close the folding-door but he whispered:

"No, no, I cannot afford it. I have too much at stake in this. Tell what it is, quick. If it is to ask me to put this off, no. You cannot suppose I'll make such a fool of myself as all that. What else is it?"

"Samson," she answered in the same guarded way, "it is only this: are you sure, sure, Ned is dead?"

"Sure! of course," he said roughly. "Didn't I see his bones?"

"And you're sure they were his? You're sure there's no mistake? Oh, Samson, I've had such dreams. I've seen Ned alive, somewhere that I never saw in my life, in some tropical country. I cannot feel that he's really dead. There must be some mistake."

Samson Darke scowled.

"Very well," said he. "Shall I tell these people that your lover has run away from ye to the tropics and taken with him the certificate of your marriage? D'ye suppose they'll believe that? And suppose he does not come back? Suppose he's alive and married to some Spanish woman? What then?"

The man spoke cruelly, brutally, as was his nature; but his last words cut her like a whip, and she shrank back, saying:

"Oh, my God! what shall I do?"

Samson drew her arm within his.

"The folks are waiting," he said, shortly. "It needs no great head to make out what's the matter with you, and if I don't care, you've no cause to. I'm making an honest woman of ye, Alice Mason, and ye ought to thank me, instead of hanging back."

Their short colloquy had attracted more than one curious eye, and Alice shrank behind the stalwart figure of Darke to escape observation. As for him, he repeated:

"Come, are ye coming, girl, or do ye want the whole town to know it all?"

Alice Norwood seemed to be trying to gulp down something, but she bowed her head and went with him before the minister, who began reading the service, and proceeded smoothly, till it came to the questions to the parties.

Samson replied in the affirmative to his own question in a loud, firm tone.

Then the minister asked Alice:

"Alice Mason, wilt thou take this man to be thy lawful husband, to have and to hold, to love and cherish till death you do part?"

Then the girl suddenly threw up both hands, with a gasp as if choking for breath, and faltered out:

"Oh, my God, I cannot, I cannot! Oh, Ned, Ned, where are you?"

And with that down she fell in another fainting-fit, while all the relatives ran to pick her up, and Darke stood looking like a thundercloud.

Alice had spoken out at last.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SEVEN SCHOONERS.

LATE that afternoon, Samson Darke, in his rough fishing-clothes once more, strode down to the port, and hailed the Flash, that lay at anchor near one of the wharves.

"Send a dory, curse you! Can't you see a man coming, but he must crack his lungs with bawling to you? All hands make sail."

The wondering seamen had been expecting a bridal procession and a honeymoon at sea: and they saw nothing but a cursing captain, in one of those moods when wise sailors steer clear of the skipper.

A dory was into the water and pulling to shore in the shortest time on record, when Darke came aboard, sullen and silent, and growled to his mate as he went down-stairs:

"All hands make sail, and work out. I've got something to do in the cabin. Don't let any one come down till we're at sea."

Honest Murphy nodded.

"Ay, ay, sir."

Then as the skipper went below the mate roared:

"Eva aboy! Pass the word to the rest. All hands up anchor and make sail."

Then came a great shouting among the various craft, the clanging of windlasses, creaking of pulley-blocks, and, one by one, the seven schooners got up their anchors and glided out to sea in the wake of the Flash, making quite a respectable pretense of being a fleet, and attracting attention from every wharf.

Schooners going to the Banks are common enough sights at Gloucester, and fleets starting at the same time no more uncommon, but such fleets are the result of rivalry and more resemble racing-matches.

It was the first time in the memory of man that a single owner had taken out seven good boats together and undertaken to play at commodore, and from that day it was certain that

Darke would be dubbed "commodore" whenever he touched land, if not "Admiral Darke."

The most scornful onlooker was obliged to confess that the Darke squadron was handled well, and went to sea with a steady and accurate alignment that would not have disgraced the navy.

The wondering fishermen watched them stretch out with a southeast wind, close-hauled on the starboard tack, and heading for Sable Island, till one by one they vanished on the dim horizon; and then all Gloucester was agog with the story of Captain Darke's interrupted wedding.

All sorts of stories were current about it, though no one had any facts on which to work.

Still, facts are not necessary to hang a story on, in a country town, and it soon became hinted all over the place that Samson Darke had been standing up to be married, and that the girl at the last moment had given him the slip and run away with another beau, to "furlin parts."

This story was contradicted by others who swore that the girl had not run away at all, but was lying at death's door in the house of Judge Mason, "all along of her beau being drowned at sea."

Any way, all concluded that Darke had been jilted in some way, and had put to sea to hide himself, while opinions were divided as to the fate of Ned Norwood. Some averred that Darke had thrown him overboard out of jealousy, others that he had been swallowed by a shark, others that he had joined a gang of pirates and gone to Cuba.

This story had been set afloat by the men of the Flash, who had enlarged on Mike Clancy's adventures, related by himself. Mike had heard Spanish talked, and he swore that the pirates were Spaniards, while the papers contained the account of how the *Liberador* had slipped out of New York, and how the Spanish consul had found it out after she was at sea.

It was rumored that two Spanish men-of-war had been sent to cruise on the Banks to look for the Cuban cruiser, and the story of her having gone down was not credited in the least.

It was known that Samson Darke, when he went to sea, had taken with him a whole battery of small-arms, but it was rumored that he was talking of going to Greenland, sealing, if he had bad luck in fishing, and the arms were placed to that score, in default of another.

Meanwhile the little fleet, the object of so much speculation, sailed merrily on to sea; and had sunk Gloucester before nightfall.

Captain Darke came on deck as soon as the sun set, and divided the watches by the usual method of "thumbing the hat."

He had the same crew as before, with the exception of the ominous thirteenth man, and everything bid fair for a prosperous voyage, as far as they could see.

A week or ten days makes a great change in the aspect of the ocean in springtime. When the Flash left Gloucester before, she had run into immense fields of ice in the middle of April. Now it was May, and the last boats that came in reported all to be clear, as far as they had gone.

But Darke knew that most of them had only been to George's Bank, about half the distance to the Grand Bank, while his own ground lay well outside of this, at the very edge of the Gulf Stream.

After setting the watch, the moody captain retired to his cabin, from whence he came not forth till next morning, when they were passing over George's Bank, with fishing-schooners anchored all round them, hard at work.

The little fleet attracted universal notice from the fact of its compact order, and one schooner lifted her anchor and filled her sails to follow after them, at which Darke frowned and cursed heartily, for he foresaw that the trawler had got an inkling that he had discovered a fresh ground, and was going to dog him there if possible.

"By the living Davy Jones," said Darke, "I'll lead that fellow a dance. Steer due east."

The head of the column altered its course, and the other schooners followed the Flash, and in this manner they sailed on all day, till Darke estimated that they must be due south of the ground to which he was bound, and the sun was setting a second time at sea.

Then he discovered a dense bank of fog ahead of him, showing him that he had come near the Gulf Stream, once more; and into this fog he plunged, with his consorts close astern.

The worthy captains were not troubled with any complicated code of signals in Darke's fleet. Their orders were to "follow the Flash and do just what she did."

They had one advantage in point of keeping together, that they were all sisters, built on the same lines, and going at near the same rate of speed.

The Flash was a little faster than the rest and had to keep her staysail on deck to avoid leaving them, but the rest followed so close that orders could be passed down the column by speaking trumpet.

As the Flash passed into the fog, Darke looked back for the stranger.

She was a good four miles off, heading straight for them.

Into the fog he sailed till he thought that he was invisible from the open sea, when he altered his course to the north and went off wing and wing, followed by the six schooners.

Then he began to chuckle to himself and said to Murphy:

"That fellow won't make much out of us I reckon, Murphy."

Murphy grinned.

"Not much, sir. But we can't hope to fool him so easy. He'll know we get out of soundings in this direction."

"By the time he finds it out, we'll be out of his sight, Murphy. It's not much I ask of fortune now; but one good trip I'll have before those lubbers find out the ground we know of."

Then he glanced back into the fog, and as he did so he turned a shade paler and gave an imperceptible shudder.

The *Eva*, the next schooner in the line, was following close behind in the fog, her huge sails spread out on either side like the wings of a bird, and her jib-boom looked as if it was coming right over the taffrail of the *Flash*, while all the other schooners were following so close behind that the danger of collision was imminent.

"My God," he muttered, "in the fog again and I'd forgotten all about it. It looks as if she were coming right aboard us, and we might run into some one else."

Then he shouted back:

"Port your helms, all! You're too close. We shall run into each other at this rate."

"Clang, clang, clang!!!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when he heard the sound of a ship's bell close ahead, and the lookout shrieked:

"Hard a starboard! Star-board HARD!"

In an instant all was confusion as the helmsman obeyed, and the mainsail came swinging round to jibe as the bow swept round, obedient to the helm.

"Hands by the main sheet!" roared Darke, the only cool head in the emergency. "Stop her, boys, if you don't want to spring the boom."

"Clang! clang! clang!"

The bell sounded right over their heads as it seemed, but nothing could be seen, though they expected to have the bulk of a huge square-rigged ship come right down on their bows, and the night had not yet fallen, though it darkened fast.

The other schooners had altered their course all in a bunch, and the *Eva* ran her jib-boom into the main rigging of the *Flash*, breaking several lanyards and threatening serious consequences, for the other vessels were being driven down on the pair and the ship's bell was still clanging furiously overhead.

Darke jumped on the rail and roared:

"Silence fore and aft! Captain Tarr, let go your halyards. As long as both schooners have the same way we'll never get apart. Let go your halyards, I say! Drop fore and main-sail!"

The *Eva* obeyed the order, and the wind quickly separated the two vessels; but the ship's bell continued sounding louder than ever, and the night was dropping so fast that even Darke's nerves owned a slight tremor.

"Starboard your helms, and steer due west!" he shouted to the captains astern. "We'll be run down in this infernal fog if we stay here long. Follow right after me."

The *Flash* wore round and stood to the eastward out of the fog, the bell sounding more and more faintly; and as Darke had anticipated, it was not long before they steered clear of the dense bank, and came out on the open ocean in the last rays of twilight, to see their hated spy not half a mile off, heading directly for the fog.

As soon as they made their appearance, the trawler hauled his wind and steered straight toward them, when Darke swore a great oath and dashed into the fog once more in pitch darkness.

"Don't light a lamp!" he roared to the *Eva*. "Just steer north, wing and wing, for half an hour, and then draw to the east again. I'll beat that snoozer astern, or my name's not Darke!"

Into the fog they went again, expecting to hear the ship's bell.

It was a terribly hazardous proceeding for seven vessels to run into a dense mist, close to each other, without any lights, trusting to luck, but Samson Darke was in that mood when he feared nothing.

Nothing was heard of the ship's bell this time. On the contrary an intense silence prevailed in the fog and the water had a peculiar oily smoothness that made Darke say, half to himself:

"There's ice here, yet, I'm afraid."

"Ah yes, capitaine," said a voice close to him, "and that is not all."

Darke looked at the helmsman who was the person that spoke:

"Who the devil asked you to put in your oar, Baptiste Landry?" he asked roughly. "What do you mean by not all?"

Baptiste nodded his head slowly.

"*Le Diable du Brouillard* is come again, capitaine. You hear dat bell? It was not ring by mortal hand. *Eh, mon Dieu*, I wish ve had not come on dis trip."

"Look here, Baptiste," said Darke, in a low but menacing tone; "I've a word to say to you and that is: keep your jaw-tackle belayed about this Fog Demon as you call him, or I'll stop it for you. There's enough infernal nonsense among fishermen of our own race, without your bringing in French devils to scare the men."

Baptiste shrugged his shoulders, French fashion, and replied quietly:

"Yes, capitaine."

Darke turned away from him, and went forward to con the vessel.

He found the hands gathered in a group on the forecastle, murmuring to each other in low tones, and they stopped as soon as he came up to them.

Darke was nettled and swore roundly at them, declaring:

"This is my schooner and I've more at stake than any of you and here you are muttering at me. I tell you, fog or no fog, light or dark, I'll steer this course till I run into something, or else—"

"Cling, clang, clang!"

The bell that had already produced such a weird effect on the minds of the sailors sounded again, right between the masts of the *Flash*.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE INVISIBLE BELL.

The clanging of the invisible bell was echoed by a low groan from the sailors of the *Flash*, who looked apprehensively up into the sky, as if they expected to see something falling on them.

Samson Darke, on the contrary, burst into a torrent of oaths, and ordered the men to their posts, while the *Flash* sailed on into the dark fog.

"'Tis only the echo of a bell, maybe many miles off," said Samson, "and you fools are afraid of nothing. Hark! it lessens."

Indeed, the mysterious bell, after clanging violently for nearly a minute, began to die away and recede into the fog toward the coast, as it seemed to them, till Darke observed, triumphantly:

"There, I told ye so. Keep her full and go below, ye superstitious fools. Have I sailed the seas for twenty years to be scared by a French Fog Devil? Yankee wits can beat French devils all the time."

The men, reassured by his confident ways, dispersed and went below, while Darke, not half so easy as he pretended to be, held on his course to the north a little while longer, and then hailed his consorts and passed the word down the line to change course to the west, and stand out of the fog.

He heard the shouts that showed his order was being obeyed, and the *Flash* laid her head westward once more and began to move through the pitchy darkness.

But after a long stretch in this direction, the fog seemed to become thicker and thicker, and presently Darke was roused from a fit of abstraction by a voice sounding close to his ear:

"Captain Darke, for God's sake let's get out the lights and ring the bell. We've lost the EVA."

Looking round, Darke recognized the form of his mate, Murphy, and could tell from the tones of the man's voice that he was nervously excited.

"What do you fear, Murphy?" he asked. "We are out of the track of ships now, and if we sound bells, we only give that spy a chance to come up with us."

"But we don't know what minute we may run into another vessel," urged Murphy. "The *Eva* may be close astern, and one of our own people may run into us again. It's tempting Providence, captain."

Darke shrugged his shoulders.

"If I take the risk of losing fifty thousand dollars' worth of vessels, surely you can do the same, Murpy. I'll not hang out a light till I know we've shaken off that spy that's followed us."

Murphy went slowly away, shaking his head, and Darke continued at his post on the heel of the bowsprit, peering out into the blackness ahead.

The only exception to the general pitchy gloom was seen at the bow, and in the wake of the schooner, where ripples of pale-green fire showed the phosphorescence of the water.

Samson Darke folded his arms and leaned against the coil of cable, musing:

"We must be getting near the place now," he thought. "I wonder what has really become of Norwood? He says he is in Cuba, engaged in some occupation that he cannot reveal at present. That can only mean one thing. He is in the Cuban rebellion, perhaps as a spy, and if I inform the Spanish authorities, he will be in trouble. Maybe our fight's not over, Ned Norwood."

Silence brooded over the sea all round him, and the fog seemed thicker than ever, when he suddenly saw, gleaming out of the mist ahead,

the faint light of a white lantern up in the air, and recognized the riding-light of an anchored vessel.

"Hard a-starboard," he called back. "Pass the word back to the *Eva*."

The *Flash* swept round on her heel just in time, and he saw, looming up in the fog against the sky, the spars of a large brig, which seemed to be lying at anchor in the open sea, without a rag of sail up.

The mist round her had lifted from the water, and hung round her tops, while her upper yards were invisible.

The *Flash* skimmed silently by her, and in a few minutes more, as Darke had foreseen would be the case, glided into open water, to find that the fog was moving slowly westward in the track of the schooner; but that, as far as they could see, no sail was in sight.

Darke looked back into the fog, and in a very few moments saw the long white nose of the *Eva* poking out, within a few cable-lengths astern.

"There," he said to Murphy, "now you see that the bold course is the best. Our friends have come through, and our spy has lost us. Stand to the north again, sir, and skirt the fog."

In fact it was not long before the whole of the little squadron glided out of the fog, and followed the *Flash* to the north, skirting the edge of the mist for an hour or more, when Darke sounded, and found himself in seventy-eight fathoms of water, with the same bottom on which he had had such wonderful luck on the last trip.

He stood on for a little longer, and sounded again. Seventy-five fathoms was the record, and the captain of the *Flash* ordered the anchors to be dropped.

Within twenty minutes of that time, the seven schooners were riding tranquilly on a gently-heaving swell, with two hundred fathoms of cable out, their line extending for about a mile, in a circuit round the coveted ground.

Hardly had they made themselves snug when the fog came creeping over them again, and they were swallowed up in the darkness as before.

This time Darke made no objections to allowing riding-lights to be hoisted, but he forbid the bells to be sounded, and set an anchor watch, as all-sufficient.

For himself, he had taken the bearings of all his consorts before the fog covered them, and marked them out on a piece of paper by the light of the binnacle lamp, so that he had no difficulty in finding them in a dory, steering by compass.

He went round to every schooner, and left his orders to hang out riding-lights, but to sound no bells unless in imminent peril of being run down.

He found them all wondering as to the identity of the mysterious brig they had passed at anchor in the mist.

One of the captains had cast the lead as he passed the stranger, and found no bottom with three hundred fathoms out, from which he was led to wonder:

"How in Hades that cuss 'spect to stay where he was, if it came on to blow."

"She never noticed us when we passed her," said another skipper, "though I hailed her, and there didn't seem to be no one aboard her on the lookout."

"Never mind who she was," said Darke. "She was no fishing-vessel, I reckon, and we've nothing to do with any one else. Be ready to set trawls as soon as day breaks, and if we work hard, we'll be going home loaded in three days."

He returned to the *Flash* and found that more than one of the crew were fishing with the hand-lines over the side of the schooner, with a repetition of their luck of last trip.

They had evidently struck the right ground, and became so enthusiastic that they wanted to get out dories at once and set trawls all night, in spite of the fog, so as to make the most of the luck.

Darke vetoed this proposition as too liable to cause confusion between rival crews; but as soon as morning dawned and they saw the sun, like a dim red ball in the sky, he recognized that the fog was getting thinner, and ordered out the dories.

All that morning the crews of the seven schooners were hard at work setting their trawls and fishing with hand-lines, the catch exceeding that on the former trip.

They felt convinced that they had chanced over some submarine valley, a favorite resort of the gigantic flat-fish they were after, and all hands were elated at their luck. After dinner they hauled their trawls, and found nearly every hook full, which, as each schooner had set a dozen tubs of trawl, with an average of fifteen hundred hooks per schooner, made a first catch of nearly fifty thousand pounds to each keel, with a prospect of making a full load in less than two days.

The excitement was intense aboard the fishing-fleet, and they blessed the fog which shut them in, for they dreaded above all things to have their ground discovered and "fished out,"

as it was sure to be if the discovery was made public to all.

They split their fish and threw them into the ice-pens, and reset the trawls before they even thought of dinner, and great was the jollity that prevailed aboard the seven.

The very men on the Flash who had been growling at the captain the night before for defying their superstitions and refusing to hoist lights, were now obsequious and cringing to him, while Baptiste Landry told him with many bows:

"You was grand man, capitaine. You was able to beat *le Diable du Brouillard*, de Fog Devil heemself. I steek by you."

Samson curled his lip scornfully.

"Ay, ay, facts: convince ye, do they. But ye'll be just as cowardly to-night, as soon as the darkness comes with something ye can't explain at once."

The afternoon passed away and evening came, when the fog suddenly left them, under a fresh cool breeze from the west, and they saw the sun setting, with the white clouds rolling away to the eastward.

They watched the mist depart expecting to see discovered the mysterious brig of the night before; but nothing of the sort was seen, and they were beginning to congratulate themselves on being alone, when the lookout hailed the quarter-deck:

"Sail ho!"

"Whereaway?" cried Darke excitedly.

"Broad off to the south, sir," cried Murdock McCloud from the fore-topmast-head. "'Tis the trawler, at anchor, under riding-sail."

The captain leveled his glass toward the south, and discovered the little triangular rag of sail hoisted by every Banker when she comes to anchor, so as to give her some command of herself if she drags in heavy weather.

A deep curse escaped his lips, and he began to mutter to himself maledictions on the trawler.

He watched her carefully, in the faint hope that, as his own schooners had no riding-sails up, they might be unseen, but a very short time convinced him of his error. He saw the schooner move slowly on as if she was hauling up to her anchor, hoist foresail and jib, and come sweeping down toward them, close-hauled under the light air from the west.

As the sun disappeared the stranger came into the midst of the fleet, and cast her anchor in the most matter-of-fact manner within a cable-length of the Flash, whom she hailed at once.

"What luck?" bellowed the strange skipper.

"None at all," shouted back Darke. "We've not taken anything but dog-fish since we started in here. What schooner's that?"

"The Edna Pew," roared his neighbor. "I guess we'll have a try at the dog fish, Cap."

Down went the lines over the stranger's side, and Darke watched him with lowering face.

The men in the Darke fleet had stopped fishing as soon as the stranger hove in sight, in the faint hope that he might go elsewhere.

A few moments later, they saw the men of the Edna haul in a huge fish, and Darke's face altered its expression.

The fish was a dog-fish.

"By heavens!" he muttered, "who'd have thought it? We're in luck, after all."

But when a dozen lines came in, and every one held a huge dog-fish, his countenance altered again.

The catch showed that a regular shoal had come in.

And when the dog-fish comes, every other fin vanishes.

The dog-fish is nothing but a miniature shark, with the same ugly shape, the same voracious appetite; but when he comes, he comes in swarms like locusts.

The dog fish had come with the Edna Pew, and the greenest hand aboard the Flash knew that their fishing was over.

Looking down in the water they could see the white bodies gliding swiftly along, and before long they were jumping all round the vessel, mad with hunger, as they always are when they come in such shoals.

Darke shut up his glass gloomily and told the men to go out and haul the trawls.

"We may save something, and the night's a clear one," he remarked.

The wind had vanished with the sun; a dead calm had come on, and the eight schooners lay swaying to and fro on the swell, as the dories put out.

Suddenly Darke started, and the sweat burst out on his forehead.

Right overhead in a clear sky, they could all hear the invisible bell, tolling as if for a funeral, far away.

"Curse the bell! Curse the ship that rings it! Curse the Edna Pew and the luck!" hissed the furious master, stamping his foot on the deck. "The luck's turned!"

The exclamation was wrung out of him against his will, as the recurrence of the mysterious sound shook his nerves sorely.

The bell kept on tolling, and he heard the men in the dories calling out to each other, as if in alarm, at something.

Then came a chorus of shrieks and cries in the water, with the splashing of oars and shouts of "Help! Help!"

Samson Darke jumped into the only dory left in the Flash and, calling to Baptiste Landry to follow, rowed off to the scene of confusion to find what was the matter.

He saw several dories together and heard cries of horror; but the confusion was over as he rowed up.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

It was Jim Clancy who answered, in a way that showed he was frightened to death.

"Oh, sir," he said, "there's a curse on the bell. Me brother Mike, sir—"

"What of him?" cried Darke, impatiently.

"He was standing up, sir, hauling a trawl, when he heard the bell, and it startled him so he lost his balance. And he fell into the water, sir, and—"

"Well, what, what?"

Darke was beginning to feel a creeping in his flesh already at he knew not what.

"The dog-fish, sir," groaned Jim, as pale as a corpse. "Before we could get to him, they tore him limb from limb before our very eyes."

The fisherman had hardly finished when something struck Darke's dory from beneath, and several of the hungry dog-fish leaped out of the water and began to snap at the oars.

CHAPTER XX.

BESET BY DOG-FISH.

THOSE who dwell on land may smile at the idea of stalwart men being in danger from fishes, the largest of which do not exceed twenty pounds, but such men have never seen a shoal of hungry dog-fish.

They are rare in deep water, being spawned near the shore, and the huge shoals that give so much trouble are composed of young fish that have not yet scattered.

The cause of danger from them lies in their enormous numbers, and the fact that they are literally mad with hunger.

Not being swift enough to catch the smaller fish that flee from them, they stick together in immense shoals, and attack indiscriminately everything that comes in their way, from a whale to a lobster, sweeping the seas clean wherever they come, keeping near the surface of the water and rushing at everything they see, to a log of wood!

Boats, and especially the oars, they bite at ravenously, like their larger cousins the sharks, and hang round them fearlessly for hours, waiting for scraps.

As for hooking them, one gets tired of that, after hauling a trawl of a thousand hooks, with a dog-fish on every hook.

Before the fishermen of the fleet could get back to the schooners, their dories were being jostled against by thousands of the wild, hungry demons of the sea, who made them tremble with the constant succession of shocks, and bit pieces out of the oars as they snapped at them.

They had to abandon the task of hauling in their trawls, well knowing that the halibut would be destroyed long before they reached the surface of the water, and had to console themselves with the reflection that the shoal probably would pass on, after a few hours.

But this reflection was not much of a comfort after all, for they knew that the fish once driven away, would not return for days, perhaps weeks.

As far as the fishing was concerned, it was ruined, and it was with a gloomy face that Samson Darke said to Murphy:

"The luck's turned."

"It's all that cursed bell," said Murphy, in the same gloomy way. "I knowed we'd have no luck arter we heard it last night. The first time it cost us Ned Norwood, as good a man as ever trod a deck, and now Mike Clancy's been eaten up afore our eyes. I tell ye, Cap, the sooner we trip our anchors and get out of this the better. We'll have no more luck on this ground."

"Perhaps not," assented Samson, gloomily; "but we can't draw the trawls till morning. It's very strange about that bell. Some ship must be near us. I've heard of such things before this. The sound comes to us as an echo from a vessel in that fog. It never comes except in a calm or a fog."

Murphy shook his head.

"It's all very well to call it that, but no ship never rung that bell. We've heard it more than once, and every time we've had some misfortun. Cap Darke, for the love of Heaven, trip the anchor and make sail. I'd rather make half a fare on the Banks, where I know what's coming, than stay here, with that bell sounding in our ears."

"Do as you will," answered Darke, in a tone of sullen resignation. "Haul the trawls from the deck if you like, if the men can find 'em. I'll say no more. The ground's ruined."

Murphy went away, and the dories were got out again to haul the trawl-buoys in to the schooners, so as not to excite the shoals of dog-fish by bringing the hooks near the surface with their loads.

When this was at last accomplished, the task began by lamplight from the decks of the

vessel, and a strange spectacle was presented as the trawls came in.

The lights shone down into the water, revealing its dark-green depths, fairly swarming with the hungry demons of all sizes, from the eleven or twelve-inch baby, only a month old, to the three-foot embodiment of pitiless rapacity, glaring up, green-eyed, at the schooner.

They could see the long lines of the trawls coming up to the surface, and as each loaded hook came in sight, there was a rush of the swarming dog-fish to eat the unhappy halibut or cod off the hook, so that it vanished in less than five seconds.

In many cases the last dog-fish that bit at the morsel remaining on the hook was caught himself, and no sooner did his friends see he was unable to resist than they flew at him with charming impartiality, and tore him likewise to pieces.

Samson Darke heard the bustle of drawing the trawls, and came to look down.

When he saw the hungry dog-fish he shuddered slightly, but continued to gaze as if fascinated till the last hook was hauled empty on board.

Then Murphy said:

"Now, Cap, shall we haul short and trip?"

Darke hesitated.

He looked around him at sea and sky. All was in dead calm and quite clear, but over on the eastern horizon still hung the low bank of the fog.

The riding-lights of his consorts lay in a circle round, and the trawler that had brought them so much bad luck was apparently hard at work, her crew fishing with hand-lines by the light of lanterns.

"They must have queer taste," quoth one of the men, referring to them. "If they like dog-fish, we wish them joy of it."

"No," said Samson Darke suddenly, in answer to Murphy's question after cogitating over it for nearly a minute. "I'll not move till the wind comes. Let the hands go below, and set the anchor watch."

He went to his cabin in sullen mood, and silence reigned over the fleet.

Samson Darke went to his cabin-windows, lighted a pipe and smoked stolidly away, looking down into the sea for nearly the space of an hour more.

The men, wearied with their day's work and gloomy under its disappointing close, had fallen asleep, and he was the only man, except the anchor watch on deck, who kept his eyes open.

Samson was in a savage, desperate humor that night. He had played his best card, and it had failed with Alice Norwood.

She had fainted away at the altar, and the doctors had been called in, and pronounced her to be suffering from incipient fever of the brain.

The marriage had to be put off, and it was a grave question in Darke's mind whether he would ever marry Alice now.

That she loved Ned Norwood he knew; that they were married, he felt sure, from the evidence of the letter, but if Norwood had with him the certificate of their marriage, something might be done yet.

Samson sat there at his cabin windows, smoking and cogitating.

The cabin was dark and silent, save for the snores of the sleepers; but outside hung a lantern, which sent a ray of light far down into the green water.

Without paying any particular attention to anything, Darke gazed down vaguely into the water, revolving schemes of disposing of Ned Norwood, in case he should come back, when he became sensible that the dog-fish were rushing past the vessel in a tremendous shoal, as fast as they could go.

He leaned over out of the cabin window, and could see them shooting past like meteors, going toward the east and deep water.

"What's up?" muttered he. "They look as if something was chasing them."

For nearly a minute the dog-fish raced by the ghosts in the dark water, and then came something Samson had never seen before, though he had heard of it, as every sailor has.

Into the midst of the close-packed shoal darted a long, snake-like head, as long as a puncheon, with glaring eyes, wide jaws that snapped right and left, taking in several fish at a gulp, while a long, serpentine body went wriggling along with immense swiftness through the shoal, going right and left, devouring as it went.

It passed in less than ten seconds, and then succeeded a perfect blank.

The dog fish had cleared a perfect track before them, and the sea seemed empty of fish, while the sea-serpent had proved more voracious even than the dog-fish.

Darke looked thoughtfully down into the sea, muttering:

"Ay, ay, ye all eat each other, and the weakest is food for the strongest. The law of nature cannot be broken, and who shall blame me for using my strength? By the gods, I'll do it. Ned Norwood, look to yourself."

He went on deck and began to peer over the sea.

All round him the riding-lights of his consorts

at anchor showed by their gentle swaying that the calm continued, while the moon, in her last quarter, was just lifting her red horns over the fog in the east.

Away off in the southeast Darke saw a light moving slowly over the surface of the sea, where none had been an hour before. He hurried below to get his glass, leveled it at the light, and beheld the very brig that he had seen at anchor in the fog moving slowly along, with naked masts and yards, in a way that showed her to be a steamer.

She was just coming out of the fog when he first sighted the light, but almost instantly extinguished it on arriving at open water, and glided silently on toward the seven anchored schooners.

Darke leveled his glass to watch the brig more closely, muttering:

"What does he want here?"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE REY ALFONSO.

The strange brig was clearly a steamer of some sort, though she did not appear to have much power in her engines from the slow way in which she moved.

Nevertheless she came straight toward the anchored vessels, and Darke saw that she was coming to pay them a visit.

He watched her slow progress till he could distinguish the low cheering of her crew and finally she came to a pause about a quarter of a mile off, and he saw a boat putting out from her side.

It pulled steadily toward the fleet, and he could see that it was heavily manned, pulling six oars of a side.

"A man-of-war," he muttered, "but what's a man-of-war doing here? A pirate? Pshaw! there are no such things nowadays. Steam has stopped all that. I'll hail the boat."

He stepped to the quarter-rail and looked at the approaching boat. There was no question as to its being a man-of-war boat from the precision of stroke which characterized it.

It was within a hundred feet of the Eva and going toward her when Darke hailed:

"Boat ahoy; what d'ye want here?"

The boat ceased rowing at a word in some foreign language and swept round toward him under the influence of the rudder till he was near the Flash.

Then he saw that it had several marines in the stern with muskets and that the crew were armed, while an officer sat in the stern-sheets.

The men made a few more strokes and the boat glided alongside when the officer stood up and said in a low tone:

"You de capitan?"

"Ay, ay, I'm captain," said Darke.

"I come aborda. I vant spika vid you," said the officer, and so saying the boat was laid alongside of the Flash and a tall, handsome young man in a gorgeous uniform came aboard.

He looked round the decks of the Flash with much satisfaction and said:

"All sleepa. Ver goot. I vant see you, not dem. Vat dis sheep?"

"Schooner Flash, of Gloucester, trawler," said Darke gruffly. "Who are you and what's that brig out yonder?"

The Spanish officer drew himself up with some pride as he answered:

"I am Don Juan Tissada, teniente de gunboat Rey Alfonso. Ve send 'ere to stay and protect de Spanish commerce. My frien', you see or 'ear of steamer round 'ere, dey eall de Liberador?"

"The Liberador?" echoed Samson. "What, are you looking for her?"

"Ve are, my frien'. Ve 'ave information dat she come to de Banks two week ago and have take and sink t'ree Spanish sheep."

Darke was surprised and delighted at the news.

He had gathered from Mike Clancy the fact that his captors on the last voyage were Spaniards and that the men had the word Liberador on their hats, and he jumped to the conclusion that she must be the missing Cuban cruiser.

"Well," he said slowly, "I can't say we've seen her this trip, but we did last trip, on this very ground."

The Spanish officer seemed to be delighted, for he laid his hand on Darke's sleeve and said in the most coaxing manner:

"My dear sare, my dear frienda, dat is de besta news we 'ave 'earda yet. Tell me all about it. 'Ave a cigarrita. Permita me."

He produced a case of real fragrant Havana cigars and offered one to Darke adding:

"My dear sare, you belong to von greata nation dat is at peace viz Spain. You vill not tell anyting to shield dat pirata, dat sheep accursed—maldita—ah carambo! I do hate de rebel and pirata. You s'all tell me all 'bout eet, ha?"

"Certainly," replied Darke, readily. "I've no sort of objection. But how long have you been on this station, Lieutenant?"

Don Juan considered a moment.

"Five day," he answered. "Our consul send de information dat de pirata 'ave leave de city of New York and ve come out as soon as ve get de news."

"Well," replied Darke, "it's not very much I know, but such as it is you're welcome to it. Three weeks ago I was on this ground, which was all covered with ice, floating down with every ebb tide. One night there was a very heavy fog, and we were nearly caught in the floes and bergs. We had to trip the anchor and make sail. Just before we tripped we heard a gun of a vessel in distress and a ship's bell ring hard. Next day we went to look for two of our men lost in the fog. We picked up one, but found the other had deserted to a vessel whose men had the word *Liberador* on their caps."

Don Juan rubbed his hands.

"Dat is goot, ver' goot, sare, ver' goot. But do you know vat has become of her?"

"I can't say," returned Darke slowly; "but I have a very strong suspicion that I know where her crew are now."

"Vere, vere?"

"In Havana," said Darke quietly.

Don Juan started, and then said:

"Oh, sare, sare, dis eez not fair as a member of de great nation to us. Havana? It is not posseeble. Dere is no rebel in Havana. Vat make you t'ink so?"

He seemed to think Samson was laughing at him, and yet uncertain what to believe.

Darke laid his hand on the Spaniard's arm and said to him in Spanish:

"Come over to the other side of the deck out of earshot of your crew. My lookout only talks English."

Don Juan complied instantly, saying in a tone of great gratification:

"And you talk Spanish? Where did you learn it?"

"In Cuba. I used to be in the fruit trade once," answered Darke; and then he led the way to the bow, saying to Malcolm McCloud, who was on the watch there:

"Go aft. I've something to say to this officer and want no listeners."

Malcolm obeyed and Darke continued to the Spanish lieutenant:

"Can you tell me what steamer left Havana for New York on the 27th of April?"

"The 27th—let me see—yes, it was the Moro Castle, I'm sure."

"She brought a letter from the man in my crew who deserted to the *Liberador* ten days before."

"Are you sure?"

Don Juan seemed much excited at the news.

"I am sure. I saw the letter."

"Where is it now?"

"It is burned."

"That is very unfortunate, senor."

"So it is, but it cannot be helped."

"Was the letter to you, capitan?"

"No; it was to a lady—to—to my wife in fact."

Don Juan looked at Darke narrowly and said in a tone of conviction:

"Go on, senor; I see now that you are telling me the truth. This man, can you give me any description of his person?"

"I can, in full. Why do you wish it?"

"We are not certain of the identity of any of the *Liberador*'s crew save one, the commander, Saluda. He is too well known to venture into Havana. But if this man of yours is there, he would of course be safe as a stranger. He might be made useful as a spy."

"Precisely my idea, Don Juan, and therefore I hope to see him punished at once, for a spy is my abhorrence."

"Give me his description, then, if you please, senor capitan, and I will see to it that he is stopped from further mischief."

"He is a young man of twenty-four, with brown eyes, hair and beard, which latter he wears cut in the English style. It is very strong for so young a man. He stands six feet high and is powerfully built, nearly a hundred and eighty pounds in weight. He is a college graduate and talks French well, but no Spanish, as far as I know, and his name is Edward Norwood."

The Spaniard listened attentively and made Darke repeat the description twice.

Then he said with an air of satisfaction:

"If this Norwood be in Havana, he shall be in prison within twenty-four hours."

"Twenty-four hours!" echoed Darke. "How can you do that?"

"We have a cable to Havana, senor. Tell me, have you any other news to give me?"

Darke considered a little and the thought struck him to intercept the letter which Ned had promised to write Judge Mason.

"How many steamers come from Havana, every week?" he asked.

"Two, senor."

"In the letter which Norwood wrote, he said that he was engaged in an occupation that he could not yet disclose, but that he would soon write again. If he does so can his letters be found or not? The people to whom he writes know no one in Havana but him."

Don Juan smiled patronizingly.

"Senor, you do not know our powers over the mails. We are not like your American post-masters, afraid of the people. Give me the names of the persons to whom this man is likely

to write and not a letter shall reach them. Every one will be opened. Let me see. You say he wrote by the *Moro Castle*. The next steamer is the *Reina Cattolica*. She is due in New York the day after to-morrow. I can stop her. Give me the names."

Darke felt himself trembling with excitement.

"The names of the persons he is likely to write to are Judge Orville Mason, Miss Alice Mason, and Mrs. Alice Norwood, Gloucester, Massachusetts. His letters may contain words of confidence. If you find any—"

"We shall know how to use them, senor. I am obliged to you for your information. If we do not catch the *Liberador* at least we shall catch one of her spies."

"I am afraid you'll never catch the *Liberador*, senor," said Darke.

"Why not, senor?"

"Because from what I saw I am inclined to think she was nipped in the ice when we so nearly went down ourselves. I did not tell you that the man who rejoined us was chased over the ice by a boat's crew of these people but that nothing was in sight but a steam launch."

"A steam launch. That is singular. They could do no damage in a steam launch; but I hear they have taken three Spanish traders already. At least, they are missing and over due many days."

"Then it is as I suspected," said Darke. "This vessel has a consort hanging round here. Tell me, senor, have you not been puzzled lately by a bell, ringing at intervals?"

Don Juan looked at him curiously.

"Have you too heard that bell?" he asked.

"Yes, senor. It has been the cause of much silly superstition on the part of my men, but I have felt confident that it came from some ship that had a good reason for keeping hidden in the fog."

Don Juan nodded.

"You're right, senor. We hunted for it on more than one occasion, but I am satisfied that it is useless. Whoever rings that bell, does not intend to be caught. Farewell, senor. I hope to see you again some day. I wish you good luck at your fishing. Your name and address, if you please. We may wish to hold some further communication with you."

Darke gave them, and Lieutenant Tissada stepped into his boat and was rowed away.

The whole colloquy had taken place so quietly that none had wakened aboard the Flash.

Darke watched the boat row to the brig, saw it taken aboard, and very soon saw the steamer move away to the westward, while the smoke coming from her low funnel, showed that she was getting up the steam in earnest.

Then he went below and turned in to sleep with a sense of satisfaction that soothed him wonderfully.

This time he was sure he had trapped Ned Norwood for good.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ICE BEACON.

NEXT morning, when the sun rose, the fog came rolling in again toward the fleet of anchored schooners, while a light breeze set in from the west.

The seven lifted their anchors with the first streaks of dawn and stood off into the fog, following the Flash, for Samson Darke had resolved to try still deeper water.

The *Edna Pew* lay where she had anchored the evening before, as if determined to try her luck where she was, suspecting a trick from her rivals, and Darke's squadron soon lost sight of her.

Nothing but the confidence felt by the sailors in the ability of Samson prevented them from open murmuring, for they had been much impressed by the mysterious bell and the disasters that seemed to follow whenever it was heard.

Malcolm McCloud had spread the story of the secret conference with the Spanish officer in the night, and the fact of its being conducted in a foreign language made it additionally mysterious, though none knew its purport. It was supposed to have some connection with the invisible bell, and when Samson stood off into the fog, it was whispered that he was going to search for the ringers. One after another, the seven schooners rushed into the fog, and stood on to the east, going wing and wing, for several hours.

The mist was just thin enough to see a vessel from stem to stern and catch the outline of another, if not more than a hundred feet away, and the seven followed so close that they never lost sight of each other.

As they went, Darke passed orders to sound frequently, and discovered that the water remained at seventy-five fathoms for a long time.

Then it shoaled very rapidly, till thirty were reached; at which it remained for about a mile when it began to deepen once more!

They had passed over one submarine valley to its encircling hill or bank, and had entered another of unknown depth. The lead, as they advanced, kept on giving indications of increased profundity, till it reached a hundred and five fathoms, where it remained stationary, with a muddy bottom.

As soon as this stage was reached the captain of the Flash ordered the anchors cast and hand-lines baited and dropped. Such a thing as anchoring in a hundred and five fathoms had never been heard of even among the Gloucester trawlers, but they obeyed orders and cast in their lines at the order.

No sooner had they touched bottom than the fish began to pull in a way that showed they had reached another good ground.

And when they began to haul in, Darke's policy approved itself; for it was evident that the deeper water afforded larger fish.

Halibuts weighing from two to three hundred pounds were coming up every moment, and when they set their trawls it soon appeared that the next cast would fill the vessel to the gunwales.

All day long they worked, till the mist began to darken round them, when Darke said to Murphy:

"Now, my lad, ye see that the man who fights luck like a man, wins in the end. We're loaded up, and the men who came out with us, will take in a couple of hundred for a week's fishing. What d'ye say to Darke's luck?"

Murphy seemed to be convinced for he answered:

"You're a wonderful man, Cap, wonderful. I'll never grumble again, and I don't believe the boys will, unless they hear that bell again."

"And suppose they do?" retorted Samson testily; "suppose they do. Won't you all know it's a vessel in the fog? That's common enough."

Murphy looked uneasily round.

"Vessels in the fog don't ring bells up in the air, Cap, and the men won't believe it's a real ship's bell."

"What do they think it is then?"

Murphy lowered his voice mysteriously.

"They think it's a warning."

"A warning to what?"

"To leave the place."

"And why, why?"

"Well, ye see, Cap, the boys are used to George's and the Grand Bank; they're used to the shore fishery and the Bank fishery; but they're used to having plenty other folks near 'em, and they say 'tain't natural to come out here, where no man's ever been before, to fish in a hundred fathoms water. It skeers 'em."

Darke gave a short, scornful laugh.

"Scare them, indeed! They're great sailors. I've been all over the world and never saw the place that scared me. Well, tell 'em to get up the anchors and make for home now. We've done enough, and I don't want another night's nonsense over their superstition, because it's dark and foggy."

Murphy turned away to roar:

"All hands up anchor and make sail! Pass the word. All hands up anchor and make sail, all down the line!"

Instantly came a cheer from every schooner in the little fleet, which showed how welcome was the order, and the windlasses began to clank to and fro as the anchors came up, while the creaking of pulley-blocks showed how fast the sails were being hoisted.

It was still light enough to distinguish faintly the outlines of the nearest schooners, and Darke was pacing the deck in his restless way, fretting at the slowness with which the long cables came in, when once more they heard the clangor of the invisible bell, up in the air, and a groan of superstitious terror broke from the crew of every vessel in the fleet.

Darke ground his teeth and cursed roundly.

Stick to your work, ye superstitious idiots," he roared. "The bell hasn't prevented us from getting a full fare in two days, and it won't prevent us from getting home again."

His voice, powerful as it was, was hardly heard for the loud clanging of the invisible bell, which died away as suddenly and causelessly as it had begun with the fall of night, which now became complete.

The angry Darke roared out as soon as the bell stopped:

"Make sail and stand for home. I defy the devil and all his imps to cheat us out of our fare."

As if the challenge had been heard, the bell clanged again, and continued without cessation for a good five minutes, during which time the sailors worked madly at the windlasses, and a panic fell on all the vessels of the fleet, in which Darke was the only person that failed to join.

He cursed and swore violently, caught hold of a hand-spike, and raged round among the men, making them cease work; while from the other schooners one might hear the shouts of the excited captains:

"Hoist away on the halyards there! Give her all she'll stand!"

"Get up that staysail!"

"Go aloft, two of ye, and set the topsails!"

"Jib halyards! Haul away!"

And all the while the bell clanged overhead, and the blocks creaked, canvas flapped and masts groaned, while one after another the swift schooners rushed past the Flash into the fog, in such desperate hurry and confusion that

more than one came in collision, and one might hear the snapping of jib-booms, and the shouts of excited men.

"Port your helm!"

"Hard a-starboard!"

"Keep her away!"

"Luff! curse you, luff!"

And in a few minutes more the voices had receded into the fog and darkness, when the bell gradually ceased, and a deep, intense silence fell over the Flash, left all alone at her anchor.

Then Darke calmed down a little, and said to Murphy:

"Is the anchor a-trip yet?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" responded the mate tremulously. "I reckon she's half-way up to the top, sir, only we stopped heaving when you ordered."

"Right. Of course I ordered it. D'ye s'pose I'm going to let a pack of cowardly lubbers take my ship out of my hands. Now, get to work once more and cat the anchor. Then make sail."

The sailors went at their work again with a slow deliberation, in marked contrast to their previous nervous haste, and Darke walked up and down the deck, dropping a word here and there in a milder tone, till the anchor was cat-ted, and the Flash moving off under her fore and mainsails, with a single jib.

The wind was still blowing from the west, and Murphy was giving the orders to haul the sheets in close, and stand to the southwest, when Darke woke up from a brown study, to say:

"No, no, never mind. Slacken out the sheets, set topsails and steer southeast."

"Southeast!" echoed Murphy, amazed.

"Southeast, I said," was the frigid response.

Murphy touched his hat and said no more, as the Flash laid her head toward the open Atlantic ocean, and began to move through the fog, leaving a fiery trail behind her.

Presently Darke called out, as he saw a light in the cabin, where Murphy was lighting the lanterns:

"Put those lights out there. I'm running this schooner now."

Murphy let the match go out with a sigh, and came on deck to peer into the black darkness ahead.

On the stormiest night at sea one can watch the forms of the waves by their own light, and distinguish land from water, but in a fog on the Banks, where there is but little breeze, and the water is always smooth, the mist seems to be impenetrable. The brightest electric light cannot pierce it for a hundred feet, save to diffuse some faint glow, and the sun becomes quite invisible in the daytime.

At night it seems as if the ship were hung in the midst of a black abyss, where it is impossible to distinguish between water and air, and every step is taken in doubt.

Yet into this blackness the Flash was now fearlessly gliding, at four or five knots an hour, Samson Darke standing on the heel of the bowsprit, watching:

On they went for nearly an hour in this way, when the giant captain uttered a deep sigh of satisfaction, and said aloud:

"Now sound your bell again, and see if it scares me, whoever ye are."

But no answer came out of the fog, and in a few minutes more he called out:

"Hard alee, there! Trim in your sheets. Lay her as close as she'll go, and steer southwest by west, if you can."

The orders were obeyed with an alacrity that showed how welcome they were, and the Flash swept round and laid her head once more toward home, as could be told from the swinging of the booms over the deck, though directions seemed all alike in the vague obscurity.

On they sailed, silently as ever, till Darke, who still kept his position on the heel of the bowsprit, roared out of a sudden:

"Starboard, hard! Let go the sheets!"

The men rushed to obey the order, with their hearts beating violently, and, as the schooner fell off before the wind, saw a light high up in the fog, which seemed to belong to a vessel, but had no hull apparently attached to it.

It cost them some trouble and time to get the schooner round and near the light again, and when they did, they were amazed and horrified by the sound of the sea washing on rocks, and reverberating as if through caverns on shore.

Instantly the cry arose:

"Icebergs! Icebergs! Ware ice!"

The crew seemed about to fall into a panic again, but Samson's voice restrained them, and they kept at their posts in silence, while high up in the fog, away over their heads, gleamed that mysterious light. With the night glass Samson could distinguish something vague and white all round the light, and began to realize what it was.

The light had been placed on the top of an iceberg by some human hand.

Who had done it?

Who in the world would take the trouble to climb an iceberg and put a light there in the midst of the Atlantic Ocean?

For an iceberg it was near them, beyond a

doubt; and how many more no one could tell for certain.

They could hear the surf sounding in the caverns of the ice, and washing up against the mighty cliffs, while the coldness condensed the fog in the immediate vicinity, so that they could dimly see the spectral outlines of a lofty white mass, beside which the Flash looked like a toy-boat.

Only for a moment, and then the schooner, under the influence of her sails, began to draw away from the dangerous vicinity, going due north, till the light disappeared.

Even Samson Darke was not devoid of fear now, and he had good reason too to dread the dangers before him.

But for that light, placed there, no one knew how, he would have dashed on the iceberg and gone to the bottom in a moment.

When the light disappeared, he heaved a sigh of thankfulness, muttering:

"That was a narrow escape."

Murphy came up to him a moment later.

"Captain," he said respectfully, "the men say we'd better shorten sail. There may be more ice round, and it's sure to be bergs at this time of year."

"I say go on, and if we meet a berg it's time to get out of the way," returned Darke in a sullen way. "Some one else is in this fog, besides us."

Murphy shuddered.

"You're right, captain. Some one else is here, but I'm not over-anxious to make his acquaintance."

Samson sneered bitterly:

"What! Are you getting superstitious too? Who do you think's in the fog then?"

Murphy shook his head.

"I'm sure I don't know, captain, but it's not natural to see a light on the top of an iceberg, and to hear bells ringing up in the air with no hands to ring them. The boys say it is Davy Jones, and that he's warning us off his preserves of fish but I don't—"

"Clang! clang! clang! CLING! CLANG!!!"

Murphy started violently and trembled all over as he whispered:

"Eh, my God, captain, there it is again."

The terrible bell was sounding again, as it had sounded before, right over their mast-heads, echoing back and forth in the fog for several minutes, and then dying away in the distance, with the same apparent lack of cause as before. The men of the Flash, hardened old sinners as most of them were, began to fall on their knees, while Baptiste and Marie Landry were already repeating a Pater-noster as fast as they could gabble it, and all hands were trembling so that Darke had to caution the helmsman:

"Mind your helm, you superstitious lubber, and keep the sails full."

But the invisible bell ceased at last, as it had all along, and the Flash sailed on through the mist without further adventures, for nearly an hour, when Murphy suddenly cried:

"Light ho! Starboard bow, sir."

They looked, and saw a light through the fog, which seemed to be growing thinner before them. A few moments later they came into clear water and starlight, to behold the very trawler that had followed them, lying at anchor on their old ground, with her riding-light up. Every one breathed freer when they got out of the fog; the men left their prayers and went to their duties, and Darke observed in a sarcastic way to Murphy:

"Well, you see this Fog Demon, of whom you all prate so much, does not know how to trap a Yankee. Let him ring his cursed bell all he likes. I defy him and his bell."

As if in answer to the defiance, the bell sounded again, but this time it seemed to be far away up in the sky, and quite faint, though it preserved the same peculiarity of always sounding as if coming from aloft.

But out in the open sea the superstitions of the sailors were not so potent as in the fog, and the greater distance of the bell served to render it less terrifying.

Samson Darke ran down to the trawler and hailed her:

"Edna Pew, ahoy!"

"Hilloa!" came back the bail.

"Do you hear that bell?" cried Samson, as the Flash passed close to the anchored schooner.

"Ay, ay," answered the master, indifferently.

"What do you make of it?" asked Darke, so that his men could hear him.

"What do I make of it?" echoed the Edna's skipper, a little scornfully. "Why it's a ship's bell, in course. What in Hades d'you make of it?"

"Just the same," said Samson. "Any luck?"

The skipper of the Edna cursed violently.

"Wish I'd never see'd the place. Nothin' but the cussed dog-fish yesterday, and not a bite to-day till sunset. They're beginnin' to run again. Had any luck, you?"

"Ay, ay," returned Darke, indifferently.

"We're full to the deck with fresh halibut. Good-by, and good luck to ye."

And the Flash sailed away on her course, rejoicing, while the sailors dropped their fears the further they got away from the fog.

All night they sailed on, and next day the

wind got round to the southeast, while the Flash, with every stitch of canvas set, neared Gloucester.

When she ran into the harbor at last, five of her six consorts were there at anchor, and the sixth was beating in, with a fished jib-boom, that gave evidence of the collision in the fog.

"I've beat the devil this time," quoth Darke, as he stepped on the wharf, "and now for Alice once more."

CHAPTER XXIII.

ISIDORA.

WITHIN the tropics, where perpetual summer reigns, lies the "ever faithful isle" of Cuba, as the Spaniards called it, till the ten-years' rebellion broke out.

A young man dressed in the cool white suit which marks a well-to-do person in the tropics, and whose light hair and blue eyes showed him to be a foreigner, stood at the north window of a handsome villa in the outskirts of the city of Havana, looking out to sea.

The building stood on an eminence, with orange groves all round it, and was built in the airy style suitable to the climate, with cool verandas up to the roof, in story on story, and open windows so that the breeze might blow through every part of the house.

The young man was Edward Norwood, and he had been writing at a table from which he had risen, when a sweet voice at the door of the room said:

"Senor Eduardo, can I come in?"

There was a Spanish accent in the words, and the tone had that soft, rich depth characteristic of Southern voices, and Norwood, smiling, answered:

"Why certainly, Dona Isidora."

Then a young lady entered the room whose dark beauty was so intensely southern that no one could have taken her for anything but what she was—a Cuban.

She entered rather timidly, saying:

"I 'ope I do not disturb you."

"You never disturb me, Dona Isidora," he answered gratefully. "You are the only person here who is entirely kind to me."

"Dat is because you are alone," said she, coloring slightly. "Fader Anselmo tell me dat we must pity de prisoner and captive, and visit dem."

Norwood sighed as he answered:

"Yes, indeed, I am a captive, though no one would know it. Your brother knew what he was about when he bound me to stay here by my promise. I cannot break it if I would."

Isidora's face darkened slightly as she retorted:

"And you need not wish to. Is not our cause de cause of liberty?"

"I hope so," said Ned a little sadly; "but I know that this occupation of mine is one of which I have cause to be ashamed; and, had I known the service required of me, I would never have consented. But never mind that. I'm in the boat now, and must row for my life. You have something to tell me, senorita. What is it?"

Isidora looked as if unwilling to speak at first, and answered slowly:

"I not know, Don Eduardo, if I should tell you or not. We have news of you from America."

Norwood started, and his face lighted up.

"News? of me? What is it?"

She watched him narrowly as she answered his query:

"You haf told me of dat young ladée in your countree—"

Norwood's color left his face.

"Alice. Do you mean her? Has anything happened to her? Oh, senorita, you don't know the tie that unites us two. Tell me quickly. Do not keep me in suspense."

Isidora seemed rather to enjoy the suspense to which he referred, for she was deliberate and rather evasive in her reply:

"You t'ink ver' moch of dat ladée?"

"Much of her?"

Ned was about to speak warmly, when the look of his companion's face attracted his attention, a searching, suspicious glance of decidedly hostile import, and it flashed over his mind that it might be unwise to say too much to the young Cuban.

He was not a vain man, but it had not escaped his observation that Isidora de Saluda was very often in his company on the pretext of practicing English, and that she looked on him with more favor than on the dark young men that formed the larger part of her visitors.

The Saluda household occupied a very peculiar position in Havana, one by no means uncommon in the history of any civil war.

The father, Don Jose Saluda, was a bitter and uncompromising member of the Spanish Party, commandant of a regiment of the ferocious and ill-disciplined volunteers, and high in favor with the Captain-General of Cuba, while his son, Don Juan, had, at an early period of the rebellion, left his home and escaped to the insurgent camp, deserting the Spanish navy, in which he was an officer, and becoming what the Spaniards call a "pirate" under a commission from the "Cuban Republic," as it styled itself.

He it was who had picked up Norwood on the ice, and compelled him to go with him; and he it was who had sent him to Havana, where he was now apparently a guest, but really a prisoner, in the Saluda mansion, under the very nose of the commandant of volunteers, who treated him as a friend, and imagined him to be an ardent supporter of the government.

This matter had been arranged in a way not uncommon in our own civil war, and in any contest where opinions are divided as to the right and wrong of a given question.

The Cuban insurgents had many friends in the United States, among others a rich man who owned a yacht, and who had been the means of smuggling the *Liberador* out of New York as a peaceable coaster.

This gentleman, whose connection with the rebels was not suspected, had taken a cruise in his yacht on purpose to look after the *Liberador*, by previous appointment, and had been met, in the agreed latitude and longitude, by the unhappy remnants of her crew in the steam launch, with Ned on board.

Then had been arranged a scheme between young Saluda and the daring and inventive American, which resulted in Ned being taken on board the yacht, while the little steam launch, supplied with a large stock of provisions and coal, departed in the direction of the Banks of Newfoundland, while the yacht sailed for Havana.

Arrived at Havana, Ned had been boldly introduced to Don Jose by the American, as a correspondent of a great New York daily paper, and installed in the Saluda mansion. This was the more easy because the American owned three-quarters of the stock of the paper in question, and had the power of appointing correspondents, while his wealth made him a favorite with every one in Havana.

Ned's instructions were to learn Spanish as fast as he could, observe everything in the nature of military or naval preparations, and telegraph the same to New York in the form of quotations of the market, which he was supposed to report daily for the *New York Growler*.

At a proper time of which he was to be notified by the same system of signals, he was to try and leave Havana and make his way through the Spanish lines to the Cuban insurgent camp.

Three months had passed away since he came to Havana, and everything had gone well. He had acquired enough familiarity with Spanish to converse easily, and spent his time in the streets, apparently picking up points on the fruit market, really observing every movement of the Spaniards, and the arrival of every ship load of troops.

Don Jose who had several large orange plantations, was charmed with the rapidity with which his guest picked up the Spanish tongue and particulars of the market, and frequently aided him in sending his dispatches.

If a regiment of soldiers arrived from Spain, Ned telegraphed to New York that so many cases of oranges had been sent per steamer, consigned to such a firm in the city, and in order to avert suspicion, invariably bought and dispatched the number he mentioned.

If an expedition was being planned against the insurgents, he would send word that such and such a grade of cigars was advancing in price, and thus, by means of a secret code, settled on in advance, sent news of every move that was made in Havana to the Cuban Junta in New York city, so that all the Spanish plans leaked out, and no one could tell who was the traitor.

At first the excitement and mental activity of this life pleased him; but the time came when he began to be not weary but ashamed of it, when he realized that his news was made the basis of merciless massacres of troops, that he had caused to be led into surprises.

He soon discovered also that the Saluda mansion was rent into two factions, the old don a bigoted Spaniard, his daughter, Isidora, a fanatical revolutionist.

The old don never allowed his son's name to be mentioned in the house, while Isidora never missed an opportunity of speaking of Juan to Norwood when they were alone, and he soon found that she was fully identified with the insurgents in opinion, and a willing and active spy in places where he could not go himself.

It was this similarity of opinion that drew them so much together, and Ned had allowed the intimacy to progress without suspecting whether it must tend, till he was roused to a sense of the danger by Isidora's question:

"You t'ink ver' moch of dat ladée?"

"Yes," he answered, when she repeated the question. "She is my countrywoman, you know and we were children together."

Isidora sighed deeply.

"Ah, yes, dat is true. And you must be ver' fond of her, Don Eduardo. Ver' fond, indeed. She is fair, like you?"

"Yes," answered Ned shortly.

Then he remembered her message.

"But you say you have news of her? What is it?"

Isidora returned to her point.

"You love her ver' moch?"

Ned compressed his lips.

"Well, suppose I do?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"It is no import. I haf heard of her from a fri'nd of mine, Don Juan Tissada."

Ned raised his eyebrows.

"Don Juan Tissada? I don't know him. He can't know her. She lives in a Yankee fishing-port."

Isidora smiled and tossed her head.

"Dat is no import. De sheep go every vere. Tissada is teniente of de Rey Alfonso, and 'e is hombre de bien—you say rich. My fader vant me to marry heem, Don Eduardo. Vat you t'ink?"

Edward answered at once, as he knew she wanted him to answer:

"I hope not, Dona Isidora. I don't think any man good enough for you, and least of all a Spanish officer, whom you hate."

Isidora opened and shut her fan in the coquettish manner peculiar to the ladies of her race.

"Tissada 'e love me. 'E worship me. 'E is not cold, like you."

Edward saw that without much coaxing and some lying he would not get out of her what he wanted, so he said, as artfully as he could:

"Ah, you think me cold, Isidora, but you do not know all. We Americans are trained to hide our dearest feelings. This Tissada, he has been at Gloucester?"

Isidora repeated the name.

"Glo-sta—yes, vot funnee name! 'E tell me 'e go dere. De capitán send 'em to do—vat you t'ink?"

"I'm sure I don't know," returned Ned, as indifferently as he could.

"To see dat ver' ladée you speak of to me," said Isidora laughing. "Is it not too funnee, Don Eduardo?"

Ned felt a cold tremor come over him.

A Spanish officer sent to see Alice! It was preposterous! What could it mean?

"And what made him go?" he asked, as coolly as he could speak. "Had it any connection with me? Am I liable to be discovered?"

Isidora began to laugh.

"Aha! You do not know de lady of Cuba. No one s'all discover you, vile I am here to put dem in de wrong way. No, no. It vas dis. You know von marinero—von sailor, I mean, of Glo-sta, dat call beemsself Darka—?"

"Darka!" echoed Ned excitedly. "Samson Darka! What, is he in it too?"

Isidora saw his alarm and hastened to say soothingly:

"'Ave no fear, 'ave no fear. Yes, yes, dat is de name. Dis Darka 'e meet de Rey Alfonso in de sea. De Rey, 'e look for de poor *Liberador*. Dey do not know yet she is sonka. Dis Darka 'e tell Tissada, you in Havana; and you write letter to Senora Darka. Ah Don Eduardo you hombre de mal—you bad, bad man."

And the young Cuban slapped him with her fan in a way that showed she thought the exploit of writing to another man's wife rather a commendable one than not, for she smiled roguishly.

As for Ned, he was astonished.

"Write to his wife," he ejaculated. "Why, he has no wife, senorita."

Isidora laughed at him.

"Aha! you cannot deceive me, Don Eduardo. Dis Miss Alice, de poor ladée, she s'all be informa of dis. But dat is no import. Tissada 'e go dere, and 'e see Senora Darka. She vas seek, seek—"

"But what in the world has that to do with me?" asked Ned.

"I tell you now. Can you not wait? I tell you. Tissada 'e no see Senora Darka; but 'e see her fader, von corregidor—vat you call judge—ah vat dat name 'e say, Massoni—no, no, Masson—"

"Masson?" echoed Ned, astounded.

"Yes, dat is it, Masson. Darka marree de daughter—Vy, Don Eduardo, que tiene usted? vat have you?—no, no, vat de mattair?"

Ned had fallen back on his chair, pale as death, and could only gasp:

"Nothing, nothing—in a moment—"

She watched him, wringing her hands in the excitable southern way, not knowing what to do till he recovered himself so far as to ask, hoarsely:

"Did you say Darka had married Judge Masson's daughter?"

"Si, si," said Isidora, forgetting her English in her excitement.

Ned calmed himself by a great effort, and his eyes glowed as he said slowly, in a deep, repressed tone, very unlike his usual frank manner:

"Dona Isidora, please tell me all that took place. There is some devilish plot at work. I fear my life is concerned in it, and the safety of our cause. Please tell me all at once."

He knew that to appeal to her for his own safety and that of the cause was to enlist her sympathy at once, and he was right.

Isidora ceased coquettling, and told him a straight story at once.

"Tissada be say dat Darka tell him de *Liberador* was sunk; but 'e do not believe it. Darka tell 'em dat you are in Havana, and dat he know it by a letter you sent to his wife. 'E give Tissada your name and describe you

fully, and 'e gif de name of dis Mason, and de daughter, Senora Darka. Tissada say 'e t'ink it strange, and suspect dat Darka be jealous, and make up de t'ing in his head, so he see de capitán, and de capitán 'e say, go to Glo-sta. Dey go dere, and Tissada go see Masson. Tissada talk ver' good Inglis, like me. 'E ask Masson if 'e know you."

"Yes, yes. And what did the judge say? No good, I fear?"

"'E say 'e did know you, but had heard you vas dead. Darka told 'em."

"Indeed? I've no doubt he wished it," said Ned, bitterly; "but go on."

"Tissada tell 'em dat 'e 'ear you vas not dead, but join de patriot in Havana; and ask 'em if it was true dat you vas write to Senora Darka. And den dey talk moch, and de judge tell 'em to keep it secret dat you vas alive. It would do no good. 'E wish you no 'arm, but 'is daughter vas now marree to Darka, and if she know you vas alive, it would make trouble in de familee. Den Tissada he promise you s'all not be harm so long you stay in Havana. You can do no harm here, and he vill have you watch. Aha, Don Eduardo. He do not know all. And de Rey Alfonso in porta now, and I get all from Tissada. And now you see de ladée of de Nort' she cold, she false, she marree oder man, and you s'all not go away no more. Is it not so?"

The pretty Spaniard closed with a look of coquettish meaning, and it was plain that to her the news which would keep Norwood in Havana was far from being unwelcome in any manner.

"Yon s'all stay 'ere; is it not so?" she went on more earnestly, watching Ned's face very closely.

Norwood felt the cold sweat stand on his forehead as he reflected.

He knew that he was in a position of great peril, whichever way he turned.

Tissada's revelations wormed out of him by the wily Isidora showed Ned that he was under police surveillance by the Spanish authorities, while he also knew that another system of spies, no less effective and far more secret, existed throughout the city on behalf of the Cubans.

Mysterious murders occurring nightly, in which the victims were always members of the Government party, attested the existence of the assassination party, and Ned knew that, should he attempt to escape without the orders of his chief, he would be dogged at every turn by men sworn to destroy traitors to the cause.

And here he was tied down in Havana, with the news coming to him that Alice Mason had married Darke, while Isidora de Saluda, who he now realized was in love with him and full of Spanish jealousy, was saying to him:

"You will stay 'ere; is it not so?"

Norwood felt that dissimulation was the only means by which he could save his life from the snares gathering round him, so he boldly answered:

"Of course I shall stay here. There is no other course for me to pursue, Dona Isidora."

"And dis Senora Darka," she pursued, with all the jealous persistence of her race, "it is not true dat you love her, Don Eduardo?"

"Love Darke's wife!" echoed Ned. "If Judge Mason's daughter has really married that man Darke, I should hate her forever."

Isidora smiled as one well pleased, and her eyes sparkled as she said, energetically:

"She bad, bad woman! I hate her, too. But if I t'ink you love her still, Don Eduardo—"

She stopped and seemed hesitating, so that he asked her, a little uneasily:

"Well, what then, Dona Isidora?"

Isidora ground her white teeth together as she answered:

"I would keel you bote. *Si, si.* I would keel you, Don Eduardo."

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNDER WATCH.

FOR some days after the revelation of Dona Isidora, Ned Norwood was in a state of suppressed excitement he could hardly restrain from breaking out openly.

He had attached no danger to the fact of his having received no reply to the letters he had written to Alice and Judge Mason, because in them he had given no clew to his address, and had been guarded in mentioning what he was doing, for fear of his letters being opened by government spies.

He had told the judge that he had secured a position as correspondent of the *New York Growler*, and told him to ask the proprietor as to the ability he possessed to care for a wife. To this he had received no answer, but had expected none also.

Now, reasoning from Isidora's news, he found that his letter to Alice must have been intercepted by Darke in some way, otherwise Darke could not have known him to be in Havana.

And now the news came to him that Alice had married Darke, when he himself had hidden away close to his heart the certificate which showed that she was his own wife. He could not believe it; he would not.

"She is *my* wife," he would say to himself. "No one can take her from me."

Then he thought of Isidora's words that Judge Mason had told the Spanish officer to conceal the fact of his being alive for fear that it might make "trouble in the family."

The more he thought of this, the more he began to think that by some means Alice had been coerced into marrying Darke.

And if she had, what was he to do?

He knew that in such a case the punishment would fall on Alice and no one else.

Could he return home and expose her to shame when he was the only person who knew she was married to him?

But then, on the other hand, could he believe that Alice had married Darke?

Might it not be some devilish plot of the revengeful Captain of the Flash who had sworn to him he should never wed Alice, but who had been so strangely silent and sullen as soon as he found that the pair had already eluded his vigilance?

The more he thought, the more perplexed and miserable he became till at last he made up his mind that, cost what it might, he must escape from his present position and get back to Gloucester in some way.

If Alice had really married Darke, believing Norwood dead, he would never disturb her. She should never know but what he was really dead.

He would retain the name that he had assumed in Havana, where he was known simply as Don Eduardo Blanco, and the identity of Ned Norwood should be lost forever.

But satisfy himself he must and to do so he must escape from Havana.

How to do this became a problem that occupied his attention day and night till an unexpected occurrence put the opportunity in his way.

One day Isidora came to him pale and nervous looking, saying:

"Don Eduardo, we 'ave suffer a deep, a great misfortune."

"What is it?"

"De patriot 'ave been defeated and one of de prisoners 'ave turned traitor."

"Indeed?" said Ned listlessly; for he was in that state when he hardly cared for danger to himself.

"It is true. But dat is not all. It is expect dat 'e vill denounce many in de citee, and 'e 'old many secrets, even yours. It is settle dat you must fly."

Ned's face brightened.

"Is that all? I'm ready. I would rather have one good fight than stay here, however good the pay to play the spy."

Isidora's eyes filled with tears.

"Ah, yes, you are tired of me. You would fly anyvhere to be free."

Ned saw that he had made a mistake, for he knew the girl's jealousy, and when once a single informer is found in a conspiracy he is apt to be followed by others.

"You are wrong," he said soothingly. "It is true I am tired of this life, but not of you."

Isidora brightened up instantly.

"Den it is settle. I, too, am tired of dis life. I would be a heroine, like de maid of de city of Saragossa. I 'ave a plan: we vill flee togeder."

Ned was astonished and confounded.

Flight to himself was easy enough, but with a woman to incumber him, difficult if not impossible.

The only obstacle to his taking the next boat to New York lay in the fact that he dreaded to be assassinated by the Cubans if he allowed his intention to be known, they being all suspicious of traitors to the cause.

With Isidora by his side this danger would be removed, but another would become imminent. How could he avoid telling her his true position, and to what lengths would her jealousy lead her when she found he really loved another woman?

To gain time he expostulated.

"But, Dona Isidora, it is not possible. You are a woman unfit to encounter hardship."

She waved her hand impatiently.

"Dat is not'ing. I 'ave a plan: you s'all go to de patriot camp."

"But how? We cannot get through the lines of the Spanish troops."

"I vill see to dat. Be ready to-night. You must be disguise, and I vill send to you de dress. I 'ave settle it since I'ear dat Domingo Hurtada have turn traitor. I am not safe myself."

"You are mistaken, senorita. No one will hurt the daughter of Don Jose de Saluda. He is too well known."

Isidora shook her head sadly.

"You do not know. My fader would not try to save me, only from de public disgrace. 'E would keel me 'imself!"

She would say no more except that she would send him instructions what to do very soon, and then she went away.

As for Norwood, not knowing what else to do, he went into the streets to pick up news and found the merchants in the Exchange full

of the intelligence of the defeat of the insurgent chief and the expected instant collapse of the rebellion.

To be sure they had been promised that so many times in ten years that they were all a little skeptical, but none the less tried hard to believe the news.

Ned had become well known on the Exchange as the "Rubio Americano," or fair-haired American, and it was generally supposed that he was an intense Spaniard in all his sympathies.

Therefore he was exultingly informed by one of the Spanish sympathizers, a stout gentleman, who united the functions of a manufacturer of cigarritos and a colonel of volunteers, that:

"We have the murderous villains at last, senor. They cannot escape the plans of the Captain-General. We shall have the whole rebel army prisoners in three days and then we shall be able to deal with the traitors in our city."

"It is not possible there are traitors in this city," said Ned incredulously.

The fat commandante sighed.

"Ah, Senor Blanco, you cannot tell how this madness spreads. It is all owing to—excuse my frankness—your nation."

"My nation," said Ned, amused.

"Yes, senor. Not to you, understand, nor to those gallant gentlemen like you who are friends of Spain. But since your great war when you so foolishly abolished the divine institution of slavery, our negroes must needs think they ought to be free and that is where all the trouble begins. It was a thing accursed, that war of yours."

"And so you think?" said Ned inquiringly.

"I think, senor, that if there were no Americans to stir them up, there would be no rebellion here. The Captain-General has it in his mind, I hear, to issue a decree banishing all the Americans from this island."

"I wish he would," thought Ned; but aloud he inquired:

"And is this decree to be issued soon?"

"No, senor, not that I know of; but if we had our way, it should be issued. In the meantime, there will be numerous arrests this very night, and I hope the police will make examples of the insolent foreigners who dare to speak openly of sympathy with the wicked rebels."

Ned had heard enough.

He knew the commandante to be a man high in authority among the volunteers, one of the most violent of the mob of officers who often compelled the Captain-General to do things at which his judgment revolted, and at the same time this very commandante, from his habits of braggadocio, was the person who supplied Ned with his most valuable information.

The young man went off at once to the telegraph office to cable to New York the news:

"There will be a corner in oranges very shortly. Measures are on foot to buy up the whole crop to-day."

The message dispatched, he went back to Don Jose's house and kept a watchful eye on every person he saw.

He knew most of the police spies by sight, but none of them was in the street till he came to the door of Saluda's garden.

Then he saw a man in the dress of a laborer digging up the soil round an orange tree and asked him:

"What are you doing that for?"

"To give the tree a chance to grow," said the man, touching his hat respectfully. "There are many weeds to be plucked up before the orange tree shall flourish."

The language was peculiar to Ned's ear, for he was already beginning to detect differences in dialects.

This man spoke pure Castilian and sounded all his sibilant letters with a slight lisp.

Moreover, it is so rare to see a white man at manual labor in Cuba that his suspicions were at once excited.

He walked toward the house and when he reached the door turned his head quickly.

The seeming-laborer was watching him, and he knew that the man must be a spy. He pretended to take no notice, but when he got inside he went to each of the doors of the house and looked out.

On every side was a man at work under the orange trees, digging lazily away and frequently pausing, but always keeping his face to the house.

Ned Norwood knew that he was shadowed and that the time had come for action.

He went to his room and sat down to think, but could see no plan to escape.

The steamer had gone for the week, so he could not take passage for New York.

Suppose he threw himself on the protection of the American consul, what would happen?

It was the most feasible scheme he could think of, and no sooner had it crossed his mind than he jumped up, determined to try it.

But no sooner had he entered the garden again and advanced toward the gate than the man at work under the tree gave a short whistle that seemed to be a signal, and Ned saw four soldiers start out from the shade of neighboring groves and come running to the gate.

He stopped, for he could hardly believe yet

that he was to be arrested, when one of them called out to him:

"Into the house, senor; into the house."

"Why?" asked Ned, as the man came up.

The soldier shrugged his shoulders.

"How can I tell? It is the order. We were sent here."

"Then you have no order to arrest me?" Ned asked him.

"No, senor, unless you leave the grounds and house. In that case we are to lock you up in the cellar."

Ned made no further observation, but went into the house and up to his room again.

When he looked out of his window, the four guards were again at work, or rather pretending to be at work, while the soldiers had hidden themselves.

Obviously he was in the midst of some great plot for wholesale arrest, which was not to be anticipated.

He asked one of the servants if Don Jose was within, but learned that he had been summoned to the Captain-General's palace for a council of war.

Then he knew that his information had been correct, and realized that his secret must be open to all.

While he was thinking, with no very pleasant feelings, of a residence in the Moro Castle for an indefinite time, he was surprised to hear Dona Isidora's voice behind him, and turning, faced the young lady dressed for traveling, who said to him, with a smile:

"Well, our enemies are alert, but not alert enough for me, Eduardo."

"Why? What do you mean?" he asked, vaguely, for he had no idea a girl could help him out of his scrape.

Isidora looked out of the window at the guards, and favored them with a mocking sneer as she replied to him:

"Those men do not know their business. It suffices a woman to outwit them. I am going to visit my father's sugar estate and have a pass through the lines for myself and two servants. No one would harm ladies you knew, and my father dare not go. You shall come with me."

"But they will not let me pass."

"You shall go as my servant."

"Your servant?"

"Yes, that is what I came to tell you. It is necessary for you to go out openly, so that when they enter the house to arrest you tonight, they may be disappointed."

Ned was puzzled.

"But how shall I pass as your servant? I am too well known."

Isidora laughed.

"You must humiliate yourself, my friend. One must creep when one cannot walk. Listen, you are a *rubio* and bearded. You are tall and stout. Well, you must sacrifice that beard of which you are so proud, and become my servant. They tell me that in your country white men frequently put on the black skin for money and sing songs. You must do it now for your life. The carriage will be at the door in half an hour and you must be ready. How long will it take you to shave and disguise?"

"About half an hour if I have the dress."

"It shall be laid at your door with a knock. Be ready when the carriage comes. Remember, you will have to carry my boxes and they are heavy."

She went away with a coquettish smile and Norwood set to work at his preparations with a speed that surprised himself.

How was it possible he had not thought of this before? The scheme was so simple.

But as he went on cutting off his beard and shaving he also reflected that simple as it was, it compelled him to leave Havana in the company of Isidora and that he would be likely to find it very hard to get rid of her, and leave the island of Cuba.

"Never mind," he said to himself, "if I stay here till night I am sure to be arrested, and at least I shall have a chance of getting away from the rebel camp on some pretext."

So he shaved himself clean and just as he finished heard a knock at the door. It was Isidora herself with a bundle and a little basin of black paint with a sponge in it. She laughed at his clean face and assisted him with her own hands to clip his light hair close to his head.

"There," she said when she had finished, "now the handsome Don Eduardo has become no better than any one else. Haste, my friend, and apply this dye. It will not wash off for weeks so you must make up your mind to be bought and sold till I choose to make you white again. Be quick, for the carriage will be here directly, Gaspardo."

She tripped out tittering at the change in his looks and Ned rapidly converted himself into a close copy of a Cuban negro coachman, with black wool and a gorgeous livery.

When he looked at himself in the glass he felt sure that his old friend would not have known him and he was but just in time when he heard the rumble of wheels on the gravel and Don Jose's lumbering old family coach drove up with a little black boy on the box.

Then he heard Isidora's voice below, calling:

"Gaspardo, Gaspardo, *ven aca*." [Gaspar, come here!]

He knew it was the name assigned to him and he ran out in a great hurry to find his new mistress down in the hall scolding violently at the servants for not having her trunks ready in time.

"And you, too, lazy vagabond!" she cried, addressing the false Gaspardo, "insolent that you are, why do you not take hold of a box and help? Quick, or when we get to the plantation you shall be flogged by the overseer. Quick, lazy one!"

And before he could fairly shoulder a trunk, she had begun to lash him with a riding-whip and scold every one in true slave-holding style.

The false Gaspardo did just as the true one would have done, hurried out with the trunks and strapped them on the back of the carriage accompanied by a volley of shrill Spanish epithets and frequent cuts with the whip.

At last Dona Isidora was got into the carriage and she called to Gaspardo:

"Get up on the box, pig that you are, and drive to the Vuelta Abajo road. When we get to the plantation I'll see you punished."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FLIGHT.

THE vigilant guards outside were completely deceived by the behavior of Isidora. They had orders, it appeared after, to let her pass, for the reason that Don Jose had actually sent her on a journey to one of his sugar estates, which lay within the rebel lines.

The old don, with all his patriotism, had a keen eye for the main chance, and appreciated the value to his property where it lay within the enemy's lines of having a son an officer in the enemy's force.

When every plantation around it had been burned the Saluda estate had been unhurt, and Don Jose had not been above conniving at the running out of cargoes of his sugar, when other people's property was ruthlessly confiscated by the Spanish cruisers.

It was to give directions for just such a surreptitious expedition that Isidora was now going out, with her servants.

The lounging spies, pretending to dig under the orange trees, watched the carriage roll by and gazed unsuspiciously at the gorgeous black coachman on the box, so far off that they failed to notice his blue eyes, which gave the lie to his black skin.

The carriage rolled out, the black coachman sitting upon the box by the black boy who had resigned the reins to him, and soon had quitted the vicinity of the city, and was bowing along the high road to the Vuelta Abajo District, famous for tobacco and revolutions.

As soon as they were out of hearing of any chance passer-by, Isidora let down the front window and said to Norwood:

"Drive fast. It may be they'll find out the ruse before night, and we must pass the outposts in time."

Ned laid on the whip and the horses were all in a lather of foam when they reached the first military post on the road, where they were halted by a gorgeous officer and a squad of very dirty volunteers, who stared at Isidora with such evident admiration, rudely expressed, that the fine-looking officer had to order them back while he read the lady's pass.

Then he bowed low saying:

"*Pasa adelante senorita.*" [Pass on, miss.]

The carriage bowed away again and Isidora called up to Norwood:

"I told you they were not wise enough to cope with a Cuban lady."

They were past the inside lines and had no further trouble till the afternoon pretty late when the country grew wild and they could see, at intervals on either side the road, the campfires of squads of soldiers that seemed to be picketing the country.

Here they were halted by a party of cavalry, and the officer scanned the pass closely.

When he handed it back to Dona Isidora he said to her admiringly:

"You are a courageous lady to venture all alone into the country of those detestable and villainous insurgents. Are you not afraid?"

Isidora smiled and flirted her fan in the most coquettish way.

"If I am not afraid of you, how can I fear them, whom you have conquered so many times, lieutenant. No, I don't fear them, for I shall tell them that you are coming hard after me and they will certainly run."

The lieutenant looked at the beautiful lady in a longing manner.

"Ah, if I could but have the privilege of being your escort, I would venture with my troop, small as it is, into the whole army of the rebels."

"Don't trouble yourself," was the merry reply. "They might kill you after all and what would the ladies of Havana do for you at the next ball? No, no, lieutenant. I'm safe enough."

"At least let one of my men go ahead of you with a flag of truce," he urged, "or the rebels may fire on you."

"My coachman can do that. Good by, senor."

Then the false Gaspardo laid on the whip, and the carriage drove on till the sun had set through a wild, deserted country, where the blackened ruins of houses and cane-fields showed the work of the incendiary.

Isidora presently pulled down the window, and called out:

"Stop!"

The carriage came to a halt, and she opened the door before the black boy could spring down, and got out.

"Get off the box," she said to the boy. "I am going to drive on in triumph now. You go inside."

The boy wonderingly obeyed, and the young lady climbed up on the box, drew from her bosom a large Cuban Republican flag which she had carefully hoarded there, and spread it out so as to flutter in the air.

"Now," she said to Norwood, "drive on. I feel as if I had just come out of a dungeon into the free air of the open sea. Let them fire on us now if they dare. This is better than any flag of truce."

The last glow of the short tropic twilight was still in the sky, and the moon within three days of the full, shone down on the lonely and deserted road as the carriage dashed on at a rapid trot.

"The horses know they're going home," said Dona Isidora. "We shall come on the patriot soldiers very soon now."

They climbed a hill and rattled into a valley beyond, at the end of which they could see a light burning as of a fire.

"That is our men," cried Isidora, with her eyes sparkling. "Oh, how I wish I could stay here all the time. I hate Havana."

Pretty soon after they heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and a man rode up to them, who shouted sternly:

"Halt!"

As he did so Ned heard the click of a pistol-lock, and obeyed promptly when Isidora waved her flag, crying:

"Shame on you, soldier, not to know this flag. I am Isidora de Saluda. Where is my brother? Has he returned from the sea yet?"

The man put up his pistol hastily, saying:

"A thousand pardons, senorita, but we have to be very careful in these times. We have news of an expected advance. Don Juan Saluda has returned from sea, senorita, and is in the camp beyond us. He goes away in the morning."

Isidora uttered a cry of joy.

"That is good, good. Drive on, Gaspardo."

Norwood could see by the light of the moon that the vedette who had stopped them was a wild-looking fellow in leather trowsers, a dirty cotton shirt, and a broad straw hat.

He had bare legs and feet, but wore a huge pair of spurs on his naked heels, and rode a rough, wiry pony.

His only weapon appeared to be a sword stuck into a frog in his belt and the big revolver he had drawn on them.

He was very dark, with long matted black hair, and altogether as tough a specimen of humanity as one would care to meet in a day's march.

He rode on with them beside the carriage, the lady conversing freely with him and calling him Pepito, from which it appeared that she knew him well.

He told her all sorts of battle incidents that had happened within the past week, and they both seemed to enjoy the description of how a whole regiment of Spanish soldiers had been on one occasion surprised and cut to pieces, not a single man escaping.

Isidora clapped her little hands and told the wild horseman that it was well done, that she wished it could be done to all of them.

"Oh, bush, Isidora," whispered Ned, in English. "Consider that you are a woman, and that women should show mercy."

Isidora laughed bitterly.

"Mercy, indeed! You do not know our race, Don Eduardo. They show us no mercy, and neither will we show it to them."

"Who is that black thief that grumbles on the box?" cried Pepito, suspiciously. "Is he not one of the true ones?"

As he spoke, he made a motion toward his revolver, but Isidora checked him with the hasty reply:

"He is a friend, Pepito, in disguise. The police would have arrested him to-day had I not had the luck to think of this expedition. It is Don Eduardo Blanco."

The moment the wild rebel heard the name he altered his tone, doffing his sombrero in the most ceremonious manner.

"Don Eduardo is welcome," he said. "We have heard much of him, and he has sent us good news many a time. He is very welcome."

Here Isidora interrupted him by saying:

"Go on ahead, good Pepito, and tell my brother who is coming."

Pepito bowed low and set off at a gallop, when Isidora said seriously to Norwood:

"Eduardo, you must be more prudent. I

know you Northern people do not fight as ours do, but you must remember that our men are very miserable, hungry and naked, while the enemy is in the midst of riches. They feel bitter over it, and must have their revenge when they can. You must not talk against it before them, or they will suspect you, and to be suspected among them is to be in danger. Show no sign of fear or horror, whatever you see or hear."

Norwood promised, and they soon neared the fire, where they found the young lieutenant who was the cause of all Ned's miseries, returned from the sea and commanding on land.

He embraced his sister rapturously, and when he was introduced to Ned, in his singular disguise, burst out laughing.

"Upon my word," he cried, "you are better fitted than ever for a secret agent! No one would dream but that you are a real negro. Ah, my friend, we have had a glorious time since you left us."

Ned shook hands, and replied rather coldly:

"I, for my part, have not. I have been shut up in a house all the time. What have you done that is so fine?"

"I have spoiled the enemy," quoth Saluda in a gleeful tone. "With a little cockle-shell of a boat, that no one would think could have lived in a common storm, I have taken three Spanish ships and sent in fifty thousand stand of arms to the Republican army."

But I will tell you all about it after supper. You are hungry and tired, all of you."

Their supper was plentiful, but coarse, consisting mainly of pork from the wild swine that roam the woods of the West Indies at all times, but which had increased wonderfully during the long rebellion, owing to the neglect to keep them tinned off.

Fruits were in abundance, of course, but bread there was none, and roasted ears of corn had to supply the deficiency.

When they had finished eating, Isidora was conducted to head-quarters, held in a rude hut of branches in the depths of a wood, and Saluda beckoned Ned apart to a small fire.

"Come, let us smoke a cigar and talk," he said.

Ned, nothing loth, and feeling that a chance might yet be open to him to work on Saluda's feelings and induce him to aid in permitting an escape, followed him to the fire, and after a short silence began:

"Tell me what happened to you after I left you in the yacht *Mystery*."

Saluda began to chuckle to himself.

"It is too rich! By the by, you have picked up a great deal more Spanish than I have of English. It is a comfort, for it is hard for me to converse in that language. Well, you may remember the tricks we played on that worthy captain of yours in the fog, the night before we missed his schooner?"

"Yes," returned Ned, smiling at the recollection. "I fancy he must have thought there were ghosts in the fog, for he certainly left his anchorage in a hurry next morning."

Saluda laughed again.

"Well," he said, "it struck me that the same superstitions exist among all sailors, and I had often heard the French talk of a certain *Diable du Brouillard* or Fog Demon, that lures vessels to destruction. I resolved to make use of that superstition to save myself and preserve my little boat from perdition."

"And how?"

"I will tell you in a moment. First, you have been often on the Banks of Newfoundland?"

"Yes, I suppose twenty times, at least."

"And did you ever go there when there was no fog in the air?"

Norwood reflected.

"I cannot say I did, save in the very depth of winter, when storms of snow are just as thick as the fog."

"Exactly. Well, the fog was my refuge."

"In what manner?"

"I reasoned thus: The fogs are produced by the meeting of the warm Gulf Stream and the ice brought down from Baffin's Bay by the Arctic currents. They were certain to last till the ice melted, and in an early spring the ice is apt to come down in such masses that it is not all melted till the month of August."

"I see that. But what else?"

"Wait a bit. I am coming to it. This year the ice was unusually thick, but after you left us it came down in extraordinary fields, so that all the steamers gave the Banks a very wide berth. I, on the other hand, stuck to the ice as my best hold on life."

"Why? I can't see."

"Of course not, but you can listen. The ice is always covered with birds, seals, and here and there a bear. By using our guns we could economize both food and fuel."

"Fuel! how?"

"Every seal is a reservoir of oil, and we laid in a stock of dried blubber that left us at liberty to husband our coal. The steam would be got up quicker on seal's blubber, than on the best coal."

"I understand."

"And seal-meat is not bad eating at a pinch, I can assure you, when one is tired of salt beef."

and pork. But we did not stay there for the eating and drinking alone."

"I can imagine not."

"No. It was because the ice was a perfect refuge for us, hidden in the fog. No one would dream of looking for us, and no one but you knew that the *Liberador* was not still afloat. So we kept within the ice, and whenever we discovered a specially high iceberg that looked solid, we used it for a watch-tower."

"A watch-tower?"

"Certainly. These lofty bergs almost always stand out above the fog, and one can see out to sea beyond the mist. In this way we found several sails and managed to capture two Spanish vessels, bound to New York, also one going from New York to Spain, with a cargo of muskets, from a New York gun firm, to the Spanish Government."

"And what did you do with them?" asked Ned a little apprehensively.

Saluda's face darkened.

"Never mind. The ship with the muskets we brought in here and ran her ashore. Her cargo is all in the hands of the patriots. But we were near being discovered once."

"How?"

"A whole fleet of schooners came into the fog, soon after we ran back, and came to anchor in such deep water I could not tell what they were trying to do. We found afterward that they were fishermen, and we wanted to scare them off the grounds."

"How did you do it?"

"We had just taken the ship *Mercedita* of Cadiz, and had not yet sunk her. So we took her bell and put it up at the very top of a rocking iceberg, that was floating down near the fleet. It was a risky job to do, but we managed to stick in a crowbar and hang the bell by a rope so that it would swing clear and sound loudly. Then we went to the other and steeper bergs, and placed lights on the tops of all of them, just as night came on."

He broke off, laughing at the recollection.

"What was the consequence?" asked Ned.

"The consequence? A complete success. I swear to you, my friend, had I not set the bell myself, I should have been frightened."

"Why?"

"Why? every five or ten minutes during the night that berg would begin to rock and the bell would toll like mad, high up in the air, and as it sounded over the fog it was impossible to locate it exactly. We kept on the main floe of ice which was anchored fast to the shallower parts of the Banks by grounded bergs, and we heard the bell growing fainter and fainter, but even then seeming to go up in the air, not away over the water."

"And did it frighten them away?"

"Frighten them? Well you must remember it was night and thick fog. We knew where we were, because we had our bearings; but those poor fellows did not know where to go. We could hear a tempest of shouting on board their boats, but they did not dare stir in the fog and darkness."

"And how did it result?"

"Well, they kept their position all next day, in spite of the fright. You may be sure we reclaimed the bell as soon as daylight came, for we did not care to have our trick discovered. We found it nearly going to the bottom of the sea, and clear outside of the fog, so we got it and went back to the *Mercedita*. She was moored to the anchored floe. That night we set them all going again; three bergs with lights on top, and the biggest of all with the bell. We rigged the bell just at sunset, and followed the berg in the launch."

"And what was the consequence?"

"The second time finished them. They all pulled up their cables and sailed away rather than pass another night with that bell. We never saw them afterward, and no fishing vessels ever molested us afterward."

"A strange story," was Ned's comment.

"Yes," Saluda said, smiling, "it was a very queer experience. But yourself, tell me what you have been doing."

Ned Norwood gave his companion a short history of his adventures in Havana, and then broke out with his private story and what he had heard from Isidora as to the wedding of Alice Mason. He ended by imploring Saluda to let him escape to Gloucester, promising to come back again if he found that Alice had really married Darke.

"But suppose she has not and is faithful to you?" asked the young chief, whose eyes were rather moist at the earnest recital.

Ned hesitated and Saluda added:

"You need not answer. You are in love, and you are no use to us till it is settled. For the sake of Cuba, I hope she has married your rival. In that case, I hope you will kill him and come back, desperate for revenge on the human kind. Those are the men that make the good soldiers. You shall go."

"Thanks, thanks."

And Ned was beginning to express his gratitude when Saluda suddenly started to his feet, and looked fixedly at the western sky.

A rocket had just burst into a shower of red stars, over the distant Spanish lines.

"What is that?" he muttered. "Can it be the signal? It is impossible; and yet a red rocket means an advance of the enemy. Norwood, you will have to take my sister to a place of safety. We shall have an assault to-night, or I am very much mistaken."

Norwood's face fell.

The very task he was anxious to avoid, escorting Isidora de Saluda about, was to be thrust on him once more, will he, will he.

"Where are we to go?" he asked.

Saluda considered a moment, watching the distant sky, and a second rocket burst into red stars, ending his indecision.

"It is the signal of the attack," he said. "The enemy will be here in a few hours. I trust my sister to your honor, senor. You will not abuse the trust, I know."

He roused up the whole post, and a few minutes afterward couriers were on the gallop to rouse the whole of the insurgent army, to repel the expected assault, while the Saluda carriage was hastily hosed and Don Juan said to Norwood:

"You will drive away to the plantation and leave Isidora at the house. It is ten miles from here, and Pepito will ride with you to show the way. Afterward, you will act your pleasure about going to sea. Our American friend is cruising off the Bay of Sangre Cristo, and if you can get to him he will doubtless put you aboard some vessel going to your home. This pass will enable you to depart without alarming the outposts; but I warn you of one thing."

"And what is that?"

The young Cuban lowered his voice.

"Do not let Isidora know you are going away from us for good."

"Why not?" asked Ned, surprised at the penetration of his companion and wondering if he suspected the truth.

Saluda took him a little distance apart, and said confidentially:

"Between you and me, the game is very nearly over for us, or I would not let you go; but Isidora must not know it. Poor girl, it would break her heart. She has worked and suffered so much for us. If she knows you are going with my pass, she will suspect the truth. Therefore keep the secret. Say you are going on duty. Pepito will guide you to the bay. As for me—"

He paused and seemed unable to go on.

"And you?" said Ned. "Why do you not come with me and let us all flee together? If, as you say, the game is nearly up (and I suspect you are right), your life will be worthless, if you are taken."

Saluda wrung his hand hard.

"It cannot be, my friend. I am a Cuban born and bred, and I must die by my flag. I cannot afford to live. Suffice it, there is a great battle coming, and I do not hope we shall win. It will not be an affair of regiments this time; but twenty thousand men are to advance on us. The odds are too great, but at least I will not be taken alive. If the worst comes to us, tell our friend to wait off the coast till to-morrow night. If I am not there then I shall never be there. And now farewell."

An hour later the carriage entered the road leading to the Saluda plantation.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A GLOUCESTER GIRL.

ALICE MASON, very pale and weak, but able to sit up in an easy-chair, lay back in a large rocker, looking at the sea with a sad, musing glance, while her father watched her with an anxious look on his face.

It was her first return to convalescence since the day when Samson Darke had come to marry her, and when she had fainted at the altar, interrupting the ceremony.

From that day had dated a low nervous fever, which the doctors could not describe with any certainty, but which none the less had brought her to death's door.

Some called it malarial, others typhoid, another insisted it was nervous, while a fourth was equally certain that it was cerebro-spinal meningitis, but all agreed that it was a chance whether she survived, and the consequence was that they gave her very little medicine, and left her alone. The still more natural consequence of this treatment was that youth and a strong constitution triumphed over the shock, and Alice Mason began slowly to recover.

It was while she was at her worst that the Spanish lieutenant, Tissada, had called to see the judge, and had given him the intelligence that Ned Norwood was alive, and in Havana, as an agent for the Cuban insurgents.

To the judge the news was unwelcome. He had begun to entertain an unreasonable hatred of Norwood, as the cause of all his daughter's unhappiness, and to be glad that he was safe out of the way at last.

Alice, in his ideas, had secured an excellent husband in Samson Darke, one of the richest men in Gloucester, and he felt sure, as soon as she got well, that the interrupted ceremony would be resumed, and all end well.

Now came the news that the handsome "young pauper," as the judge called him, who had made all the trouble between Alice and

Darke, was alive again, and likely to come back at any moment to make more.

It was not wonderful that the judge, who adored money and respectability, should feel annoyed at the news and express himself so to the Spanish officer.

Not that he actually wished to kill Norwood, but having imagined him dead and out of the way it was too bad to have him turn up again.

He questioned Tissada as to how he had found out Ned's existence and the officer told him.

Then the judge knew that Darke must have intercepted a letter to Alice from Ned.

Strange to say, the discovery did not irritate him. He would have done the same himself in an instant, such was his confidence that he knew best how to secure his daughter's future happiness.

He only blamed Darke for not telling him at the time what he had done, and when Tissada left the house it was with the understanding that no complaints would be made if all Ned Norwood's letters to the Mason household should be intercepted and Ned treated to lodgings in the Moro Castle.

Then the tedious weeks of illness wore on and it was late in August when Alice at last was released from her sick room and allowed to come down-stairs and look at the sea. She seemed to have dreaded it before that time. When she was in her fever the sound of the surf on the shore when the wind was high had always been sufficient to throw her into violent raving in which the name of Ned Norwood was mingled with prayers to the storm to spare him.

After her recovery of control over her mind, she never mentioned his name, but lay still for hours brooding, and only shuddered when she heard the sea.

But this day, for the first time she asked for her chair to be wheeled to the back windows, where she could see the harbor and open ocean, and she lay back and looked at it musingly till the judge observed cheerfully:

"A beautiful day, Alice, isn't it. How would you like to take a little cruise for a week or two along the coast, to cheer your mind and put health into you breathing the fine soft air of the ocean?"

Alice looked round at him wearily.

"What is the use, father? We don't own any yacht to go cruising in."

The judge was delighted, for the words seemed to imply a wish on the part of Alice to go out, if she had the means.

"There's no need of waiting for a yacht, my dear," he said briskly. "I know a gentleman who has more than one beautiful schooner swift as any yacht, that he would be delighted to place at our service for a cruise."

"And who's that?" asked Alice indifferently.

The judge hesitated, for he had never dared to speak the name of Samson Darke since the day of Alice's fall at the altar.

"A—a gentleman, my dear," he said, "who is very much attached to you, very rich, and who would be only too happy to lay all his fortune at your feet."

"What's his name?" asked Alice in the same indifferent tone.

"Captain Darke," replied the judge watching his daughter's face very keenly to discover if she had any feeling of agitation.

Alice colored faintly and nervously patted the arms of the rocking-chair in which she reclined as she said:

"I remember something about him, before I was sick. Was I rude to him?"

The judge coughed.

"Well, you won't be offended if I say yes. But we don't blame you at all now. The doctors say that you must have been in a sadly nervous state for weeks before you broke down—"

"Tell me," interrupted Alice suddenly. "I don't remember clearly. Was there not something, was there not a funeral or something of the sort when I was taken sick?"

"A funeral?" echoed the judge. "Why, my dear, it was a wedding."

Alice turned her head quickly.

"A wedding! Whose wedding? Who was to be married? I don't remember any of my friends who were to be married?"

The judge was puzzled what to say. The doctors had cautioned him against anything that might excite the patient, but what was he to do with a girl that appeared to have forgotten her own wedding-day?

He affected to be troubled with a bad cough to gain time, during which Alice sat and stared at him with her great solemn eyes, as if she was waiting, determined to have an answer.

At last he managed to say:

"It's not possible you've forgotten, is it?"

"Whose wedding was it?" repeated Alice, in the same quiet matter-of-fact way.

"Why, your own, my dear," blurted out Judge Mason, getting red in the face, half angry and half afraid.

But, to his surprise, Alice manifested no sort of emotion. She merely closed her eyes and lay back in the chair, thinking.

At last she said, in a low voice:

"I was afraid I had not forgotten."

"Afraid, my dear?"

"Yes. That is the worst of it," said she, wearily. "I cannot die and I cannot forget."

"But why should you wish to forget?" ventured the judge, delicately.

"Oh, I don't know," answered Alice, dreamily, looking out over the sea. "Everything seems so lovely to-day. God is so good. The sea looks so broad and so kind. If one could only forget men and enjoy nature. But that is selfish, I suppose. Isn't it, father?"

The judge didn't know what to say, except:

"I don't quite understand you, Alice. But you needn't explain. The doctor says you must not talk too much."

Alice smiled rather scornfully.

"The doctor? Much he knows. But I mean isn't it selfish to live only to enjoy yourself? It's very pleasant, of course."

"I don't see why it's selfish," retorted the judge, rather sharply. "We're put into the world to enjoy life as much as we can, and you've got a great deal to enjoy, Alice, if you'll only look at it in the right light."

"Have I?" asked she, wearily.

"Why, certainly," said Judge Mason, warming with his theme. "Here you're my only child, and I'm not by any means a pauper. And then here's a man worth a hundred thousand dollars, at the very least, who fairly worships the ground you walk on, and all you have to do is to get well and enjoy his fortune and mine. Most of the Gloucester girls would be glad to stand in your shoes."

"Would they?" asked she, in the same weary way. "Well, I suppose I'm very ungrateful. But I don't want to be so, father. Tell me, do you think one ought to try to make other people happy by sacrificing oneself?"

The judge—keen old lawyer that he was—saw the drift of her question and answered it.

"I know one thing, that since your sickness poor Darke has been miserable, and that if you were to treat him decently you would make him very happy."

"Where is he now?" asked Alice.

The judge was so delighted at the question that he jumped up instantly, asking:

"Would you really like to see the poor fellow? He had not dared to come here since you've been well, though he was here every day while you were unconscious. Ah, Alice, you don't know that man. Such a whole-souled, generous fellow. And he has been so tormented by the gossips of the town—"

"About what?" asked Alice, wonderingly.

"About you. They pretend you jilted him at the altar, that your sickness is a mere plan to get rid of him. And through it all he has been so patient. You owe him a little happiness, Alice. He would die for you in a moment."

Alice sighed deeply and lay back, closing her eyes for several minutes.

At last she said, slowly:

"Would it make him happy to send for him, do you think?"

"He would be delighted," asseverated Mason.

"Then send for him, father."

The judge was hastening to the door when she said, gently:

"One moment, please."

Judge Mason came back instantly.

"What is it, Alice?"

"Before you send for him, I want to say a word to you," said Alice faintly.

The judge sat down.

"Certainly, my dear."

Alice seemed to be struggling with herself for a while, before she spoke.

At last she said slowly:

"I want—to ask—your advice—as a—a—lawyer as well as my father."

The judge started, and looked decidedly as if he were uneasy.

"As a lawyer. What do you mean, child? What do you know about law?"

"I want to ask you," pursued Alice in the same hesitating way, "whether a girl is married in law if she has no certificate?"

The judge opened his eyes wide.

"I don't understand you."

"I mean can she prove her marriage if her husband has the certificate, and if he is dead?" asked Alice more steadily.

The judge looked at her in a puzzled way. He thought her brain was wandering, and decided to humor her fantasy.

"It depends," he answered in a joking way, "on whether the husband left any money, and whether it was an object to prove it. Of course a marriage can be proved without any certificate. That depends on the minister. He can sign a dozen of them. The proof lies in the record and the witnesses. As long as they exist the marriage can be proved."

"But suppose," persisted Alice, "the girl does not know the minister who married her, and can't find him?"

The judge laughed.

"I should be sorry to take her case if she had to prove the marriage. But why do you ask me all these questions, child? What has got into your head?"

Alice had turned paler at his last words, and answered in a low tone:

"Oh nothing, nothing. I think a good deal you know, when I lie still—"

The judge jumped up briskly.

"Just what I thought. Well, don't you worry your head about things you don't understand. I'm going to fetch Darke, and we'll plan a nice little cruise for you in a day or two. The sea-breeze will clear all these notions out of your head. Good-by, child, and above all things, don't brood over things you don't understand."

Then he hustled out of the room, and Alice lay back in her chair, murmuring:

"What a coward I am! Why didn't I dare to tell him the truth? He would forgive me. I'm sure he would. I must do it."

But she was very weak physically, and had been brought up in fear of her father all her life, and between the two feelings she began to weep softly, and then lay quietly watching the white sails on the sea till she heard her father's voice returning, and with him the deep tones of Samson Darke.

The sound made her shudder slightly, but when Darke came in, he looked so handsome, gentle and considerate, that she could not help her heart softening toward him.

He on his part looked better than he had ever done in his life as he advanced. The one good spot in Samson's rugged masterful nature was his love for Alice, and it brought the tears into his fierce eyes, and a sob to his deep, melodious voice as he scanned her pale face, and said softly:

"And ye've sent for me at last, Alice. Ye don't know how I've wearied for ye all this time. But we'll make it all right now. The Flash is ready for sea, and ye shall say no lady ever had a prettier yacht to sail in than yours, when she goes to sea with Alice aboard."

Alice smiled at the big honest-looking fellow as she replied:

"You're very good to me, Captain Darke. I don't know if I'm worth it all. But I owe you something, my father says, and if it will make you happy, I'll go."

CHAPTER XXVII.

GOING TO SEA.

ONCE more the Flash lay straining at her anchor under a fresh southwest breeze, but this time her surroundings were different from what they had been when we first saw the little schooner, preparing for a trip.

No longer was the air cold and biting so that the spray froze on her rigging. The huge cable still lay coiled away in tier on tier by the foremast; but the "checker-planks" had been removed from her decks, which had been scrubbed to snowy whiteness, and all her hatches were open, showing an empty hold, and the cabin and forecastle fitted up as if going on a pleasure trip.

It takes but little alteration to make a first-class Gloucester trawler into a very fair yacht, and the Flash was one of the best boats in the fleet.

Her crew, too, had been transmogrified greatly from the rough figures in pea-jackets and big sea-boots that used to stamp about her decks in the winter cruises to the Banks.

They were all attired in a sort of half-naval uniform, and looked trim and neat, while their numbers had been reduced to eight, including the cook, ample to manage the vessel when no fishing was required.

All looked smiling and expectant at the wharf, and Baptiste Landry observed:

"De skeeper 'ave good luck at last, Marie. We beat de Diable du Brouillard, and we land de big fares of feesh all de season and now de skeeper get his woman at last."

"Ay, ay," said Murdock McCloud sententiously, "'tis well enough, Batees, but I'm thinkin' the skeeper's nae sae blithe as he wad be gin he could only have found ane thing."

"And what's that?" asked Jim Clancy. "Is it what became of our ground that we never found again?"

"Na, na," returned McCloud with a rather scornful glance. "'Tis easy told why that was lost, when the men were too much frechted to keep their courses and make a good departure. 'Twas all owing to the fog, when we could na tak the sun. Na, na, if that were all, we'll find it next winter by the ice, for that ave follows the same track the Lord made for it. Na, it's no' the lost feeshing-ground, but it's the thing that drove us from it."

Baptiste and Jim Clancy both crossed themselves piously.

"Twas the devil himself," returned Jim positively. "It's not the likes of the skipper with all his mad ways, to find out the thing that rung that bell."

McCloud shrugged his shoulders. He was a hard-headed Presbyterian, not given to superstition, and he had been cogitating on the subject of the invisible bell all the summer, without success.

The Flash had made several voyages to the Grand Bank since the memorable one in which they had struck the rich and apparently inexhaustible ground, but had never been able to hit it again.

They had sounded in all directions and had the usual fisherman's luck, but the lost ground had never been found again, though Darke had

searched for it again and again. They had entered the fog frequently but it had shifted its bearings to other parts of the Banks and the ice had vanished from the place they had expected to find it.

No longer could they expect to load their vessel in two days when three weeks was the ordinary trip, and finally even the indomitable Samson had yielded to fate and abandoned the hope of making a fortune in a single summer.

"Tis my opinion," remarked McCloud, "that the keeper wad rather find out what rung that bell than the ground itself. He doesna like to be beat and the bell beat him."

"Whisht, boys," interrupted Jim Clancy with a glance at the wharf, "yonder comes the bridal-party, bedad. It's little we'll have to do with bells this trip, barrin' the Belle of Gloucester."

Down to the wharf a carriage was rolling and the huge form of Darke was visible on the box beside the coachman.

The gigantic skipper was no longer attired in the huge pea-jacket and sea-boots, wherein he generally went afloat, but had shipped white ducks and a snowy vest with a blue flannel coat that lent an air of more lightness to his burly frame than it usually exhibited.

As the carriage drew up he leaped off the box as light as a boy, and opened the door to let out the portly figure of Judge Mason who looked as nautical as it was possible for a lawyer to look.

Then both gentlemen assisted out a slender figure in white, at sight of which Jim Clancy observed thoughtfully.

"Tis the bride sure enough, boys, but, bedad, she looks more like a corpse."

Then Darke hailed the schooner.

"Flash, ahoy! Send off the boat for the baggage."

The boat—a large four-oar—had been bought for the occasion and lay beside the schooner ready for use.

The two Canadians and the Scotchmen jumped in and rowed to the wharf where a whole arsenal of boxes and trunks was dumped in and Darke said quietly:

"Put them aboard first. The lady will sit here to enjoy the breeze a little."

Indeed, Alice Mason looked—as Jim Clancy had expressed it—more like a corpse than a bride.

They had placed a large camp-chair for her on the end of the wharf and the old judge hung over her anxiously saying:

"What is it, Alice? Do you feel worse?"

"No," she murmured faintly. "I shall be better presently. It's only—only—the sight of the schooner!"

"What schooner?" asked the judge. "Not the Flash surely? You're going in her, you know, Alice."

"I know it," she said in a low voice; "but at first—it brought to mind—"

"What, Alice?"

"Ned!" she answered faintly. "Don't be angry, father. I'll be over it soon. But he was lost from the Flash, and you know—"

She had grown so pale that the old man hastily said:

"We'll put it off, Alice, if you like. I was not wise to consent to this trip while you're so weak. I'll tell Darke—"

"No, no," she whispered, "it would hurt his feelings. I owe him so much at least. I'll be better. I'm better now."

Darke had been away handling the baggage, and now he came back, glowing with health, to tell them:

"The boat will be back in a moment. I sent in the baggage first that there may be no delay in getting to sea. How is Alice now, judge?"

"Better," said Alice herself. "I'll be better at sea. Captain Darke. I'm never sea-sick. It braces me up."

"Ay, ay," said Darke, cheerily, "ye were born for a sailor's wife, Alice, and ye shall see what sort of a home we have for ye, in the Flash. I've had a state-room partitioned off for ye on purpose, and ye shall have all the delight of the sea, and none of the hard times we sailors have in winter."

Alice smiled faintly.

In truth the bracing sea breeze could not but invigorate her, and there was something in the large frame of Samson overflowing with health and vitality that compelled her to be cheerful in spite of herself.

The skipper of the Flash was troubled with no qualms of conscience for the past as he looked at Alice Mason.

He only thought to himself:

"I have her now at last to myself. She no longer hates me, and I'll make her love me before I've done."

It was part of the man's nature to be quite confident of success in everything he did. He had raised himself to riches without any advantages of education, and therefore he had learned to despise education.

One of his chief grudges against Ned Norwood had been the indefinable sense that he could not quite shake off, that the young man was superior to him in something, and Samson had hated him for "priding himself on a lot of

book-learning that wouldn't help a man to a living."

All that was necessary to his own vocation he had learned as he needed it, teaching himself, and had a contempt for any man that couldn't do the like. As he stood by Alice Mason's chair now, he fairly glowed with pride in his success, in his schooner, in the weather and everything else.

"Look at her, Alice," he said proudly. "Isn't the Flash a beauty? nigh as pretty as you. See how she parts the waves as she pitches with hardly a bubble of foam. That's the bow to cut the water, judge, and as for beating up to windward, you wait till we get to sea and I'll show you."

Then he got impatient and went to the edge of the wharf shouting:

"Boat ahoy there! What are you made of in there? Is it a lot of tailors ye've got in the Flash that ye can't heave those boxes aboard quicker? Break your backs and start the boat back. One would think ye were practicing for a funeral."

"Married or single," muttered Murdock McCloud, "the skipper's as bad in the jaw as ever, lads, but he doesn't swear sae bad."

Then the boat came to the wharf and Darke picked up Alice in his arms as if she had been a baby and carried her down the steps to the boat, from whence she was safely transferred to the quarter-deck of the Flash where she lay back in a large camp-chair queen of all that surrounded her, while the crew proceeded to get up the anchor and hoist the sails with the speed and precision of a first-class yacht, while the Flash fell off and stood out to sea, cleaving the waters with a musical gurgle that made Darke remark to his fair guest:

"Hark to her speak, Alice. She laughs for joy to know ye're aboard. Now where shall we go, my lady? You're commodore."

Alice looked surprised and pleased.

"What? Can I go anywhere I please?"

"Anywhere ye say. Round the world if you like," was the sturdy answer. "Tis the first holiday Samson Darke's made for thirty years and he's ready to enjoy it. Shall we go east, west, north or south?"

"We can't go west," said Alice feeling her spirits rising every moment in the bracing air, "for that's back again to Gloucester and I'm tired of the land. Let us go east till we see no more land. I've heard so often about the feeling of being in blue water, I'd like to try it for once in my life. But don't go too far, as we may be caught in a storm."

Samson laughed proudly as he looked up at the taut rigging of the Flash.

"Ay, ay, and if we do, it shall not harm ye, Alice. The schooner's stood worse storms in her day than any we're like to have at this time of year. Hands by the sheets, boys. Ease her off, Baptiste. Swing round the fore boom. Easy, lads, easy. There, Alice, now we're going due east, wing and wing, and ye shall hold on that course till ye want to go back."

Sweet is the life of a yachtsman at sea, and no wonder rich men keep yachts as the pleasantest of all ways of spending money. To the convalescent Alice the life on board the Flash for the rest of that August day was one of such complete luxury and pleasure that she said to Samson late in the afternoon:

"I think I drink in health from you, Captain Darke. I have eaten three good meals, a thing I've not done for weeks and positively I feel as if I were hungry all the time."

"Ay, ay," said Samson cheerily. "I told ye I'd make ye all right on the sea. 'Tis the place for such folks to grow well and by the time ye wake in the morning ye'll be in blue water for the first time in your life."

Alice went below early in the evening, to sleep soundly for the first time in many weeks and found herself almost welcoming the voice of Samson Darke that had once been so hateful to her ear, when she heard him in the morning hailing her father on deck as the judge came up the companion.

"Why is it," she thought to herself, "that I seem to be forgetting Ned already, and he lying at the bottom of the sea, while I am thinking seriously of marrying the man who hated him during his life? Yes, but it was only in that he loved me and wanted to have me. But, oh, if Ned were only alive."

And then she began to cry quietly to herself in a way that showed that her grief was no longer of the violent and absorbing character that had once threatened her life.

Ah, Ned Norwood, if you do not soon come back, it may be too late for even you to win back a heart that deems itself parted from you by a grave in the sea.

The second day out was equally fine with the first, and Alice was delighted with the novelty of being on blue water at last.

Samson Darke was possessed of a fund of stories of the sea, that he told well, and to which Alice listened with increasing interest till the time came when they were all alone on the ocean, and she asked:

"I wonder how far off we are now from Gloucester, Captain Darke?"

Samson stepped to the cabin where the log

slate was hung up, and presently came back with a chart in his hand, which he spread on the skylight before the girl.

"There," he said, pointing, "is Gloucester; there Sable Island; yonder Newfoundland, and here are we, three hundred and seventy miles out, Alice, due east as you told us to steer."

Alice looked at the chart with interest.

"And are you sure this is the place?"

"Quite sure. I've worked it by dead reckoning, and by the sun and the chronometer, too. We're not a mile out of the way, I'm certain."

Alice looked awe-stricken.

"It's very wonderful. I don't see how you do it. Do all sailors find their way so?"

"If they didn't they'd never venture out of sight of land, Alice."

"And what's this thing here on the chart all full of dots?" she asked.

"The Grand Bank."

"The Grand Bank? Why, that's where you go for fish, isn't it?"

"It is."

"Do you know," said Alice animatedly, "I would like to go there and see it."

"See what?"

"The Bank."

"But there's nothing to see. It's all water just the same as this, only most of the year the fog hangs over it."

"Never mind," said Alice obstinately, "I want to see it. You said I was commodore—"

"By all means," returned Samson, with his old cheery laugh. "Ahoy there! Hands by the sheets! Starboard your helm, Jim. Trim in the sheets, boys. Lay her head nor'west, Jim; and now, Miss Alice, we'll show ye how close the Flash can cut into the wind's eye."

The change between going wing and wing, nearly motionless before the breeze, to the heavy careen of the little schooner under her piled up canvas, rather startled Alice at first, and she was compelled to brace her chair against the cabin-hatch to keep from sliding away to leeward; but when she had become used to the new motion she felt the excitement of contest with the opposing wind, and began to laugh with pleasurable excitement.

As for the judge, he was delighted with everything he saw, and especially with the marvelous change in his daughter.

Already he saw her married to Darke, and began to congratulate himself on having held out against her "silly, romantic ideas" in regard to Ned Norwood, when the lookout cried:

"Sail ho!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE STRANGE YACHT.

It was the first time Alice had heard the cry so familiar at sea on long voyages.

The day before, they had been in the midst of sails, so common they were not worth the announcement and that day they had been alone, out of the track of commerce, for the first time.

"Whereaway?" cried Darke, peering out under the boom.

"Dead ahead, sir, close-hauled on the same tack," said Perry, who was lookout. "Seems to be a schooner, sir."

Darke observed rather proudly to Alice:

"Now we'll show you what the Flash can do if she's put to it. I'll overhaul that fellow ahead before sunset."

He got up the glass and altered the course of the Flash slightly so as to give a better view from the quarter-deck when he gave Alice the glass, saying:

"There, my lady, ye can see for yourself now and mark us overhaul her."

Alice looked through the glass and beheld far away a little black dot almost hidden by the sea with a c'oud of white canvas swelling above it, and exclaimed:

"Oh, what a pretty boat. But she looks as if she would go over every minute. Look, please, Captain Darke."

Samson took a long look.

"Tis a schooner and I think a yacht," he said. "We'll not overhaul her as easily as I thought, but I'll bet on the Flash yet. I've out-sailed yachts ere now."

"Are yachts so very swift then?" asked she.

"Some are and some aren't, but I'll bet on the Flash, yet," returned Samson, in a boasting way.

Then he called to his crew to set the big stay-sail, and under its influence the Flash careened over till she buried her lee rail, rushing through the water at increased speed.

An hour's sailing of this sort and Samson took a look through the glass.

The strange schooner looked the same as ever, only a little more distant and Alice observed rather maliciously:

"She sails very fast, doesn't she?"

"Yes, yes," assented Samson, with the ghost of a smile, for the man hated to be beaten on his own element. "Of course she's a yacht. I don't say the Flash can beat every boat that swims. Yon's a tidy racer."

So it seemed after another hour's race, when the hull of the stranger had disappeared from view entirely, and the judge said, in his most nautical manner:

"That fellow has the heels of us, eh, Darke?" Samson was nearly growling an oath in his displeasure, when the stranger's slim white line of canvas suddenly grew broader, as she changed her course, and Alice cried:

"Look, look, she has two great sails like ours! What sails! No wonder she goes so fast. Oh, she's coming this way."

The girl was looking through the glass, and saw the stranger turn on her heel and come racing down toward them.

"She's going to speak us," said Darke. "I wonder what she wants? Probably takes us for another yacht in the same club."

They held their course onward, the strange yacht coming down to meet them like a race-horse, her white sails growing more and more distinct every moment, till at last, when she was half a mile off, she fired a little gun and hoisted her colors.

Samson flushed slightly as he saw them.

"I can give ye the bunting," he said, "but I don't trade in those pop-guns. I hope ye don't think I ought to have brought one to sea, Miss Alice?"

"Oh, no," she said, for she saw he was not a little mortified at the superior beauty and trimness of the stranger. "We poor folk of Gloucester can't afford such things, Captain Darke, and I don't want them. I dare say the Flash is a better boat in a storm."

Samson brightened up immediately.

"In a storm? Ay, ay. I'll back her against anything that floats in a storm, Alice. Yon gay fellow would turn the turtle a dozen times before the Flash would settle to her bearings."

"Turn the turtle?" echoed Alice, puzzled.

"Capsize, I mean. Not but what yon's a good boat. Set the colors, Baptiste. We're not ashamed of old Gloucester."

The colors were set and the strange yacht raced down opposite them, shewing a long, dark, snake like hull and a pile of snowy canvas above it, though she had no staysails set, and only her ordinary canvas.

As soon as she was abeam of the Flash she wore around, laying her head for the schooner, passed close under her stern and ranged up alongside and a-lee, at a pace that showed she could do what she liked with the pride of Gloucester, as far as speed went.

A gentleman in gilt buttons, with a general aspect of "yacht club" about him, made his appearance by the weather quarter-rail and called out to Darke:

"Schooner ahoy! What schooner's that?"

"The Flash, of Gloucester," said Darke. "What schooner's that?"

The gentleman in buttons did not immediately answer, for he turned his head to say something to a person behind him, and Darke got angry:

"What schooner's that?" he roared. "Manners is manners, afloat and ashore. What's your name and where are you from?"

The gentleman in buttons raised his cap.

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," he said. "This is the yacht Nonpareil, of New York. I've a man on board that recognized your sail several miles off. He used to be on the Flash, he tells me."

Darke turned deadly pale and glanced at Alice, who sat there listening innocently.

He suspected at once who the man was, the more so as he had heard of the Nonpareil and her rich and eccentric owner, who was always into some scrape, in one part of the world or another.

"Ay, ay," he answered, as indifferently as he could manage to speak. "I've no doubt of it. Many men have sailed with Samson Darke, and never regretted it."

The gentleman in buttons cautioned his man at the wheel in a low tone:

"Keep her off a little and luff, Stevens. We are running ahead of her. She's not a yacht."

Samson colored at the words, but as it was a self-evident thing that the Nonpareil could out-sail him easily, he made the best excuse he could by saying:

"Ay, ay, we don't pretend to be a yacht, but we can hold our own in heavy weather with the best of them, I'd have you know."

The yacht commander smiled slightly.

"I've no doubt of it. Excuse me, Captain Darke, but I've a curious question to ask. Are you married or not?"

Samson turned purple and then white as a sheet with rage as he roared:

"What in Hades is that to you, you jack-a-dandy yachtsman? Mind your own affairs and sheer off where you belong."

He sprang into the main rigging with one foot on the rail and shook his fist at the yacht.

"Is that what you came down to speak to me for?" he bellowed. "You pusillanimous, white-livered son of a sea-cook. Lay me aboard that yacht, Jim Clancy, so that I can choke the life out of my fine gentleman."

Jim, obedient to the order, let the Flash fall off the wind so that her jib-boom went perilously close over the waist of the Nonpareil as if the skipper were fully determined to run her aboard.

The captain of the yacht astounded at the sud-

den ebullition of unprovoked fury had only time to shout:

"Hard up! Let go the sheets! What's the matter with this man? Is he crazy?"

The Nonpareil fell off just in time to escape a dangerous collision, but the jib-boom of the Flash swept over her stern as she wore round, and before any one on board had time to understand what was going on, Darke had run forward along the bowsprit over the quarter-deck of the yacht and saw beneath him, Ned Norwood, in the same uniform as the owner, looking up at him.

"Curse your lubberly carcass," roared the now perfectly insane captain, "'tis you come back to plague and rob me if ye can, is it? Back to your hole ye white-livered cur and cease to trouble one who's not for the like of you."

It was but for a minute he stood there raging in a frenzy of jealousy at sight of the man he loathed with the intensity of all his feelings. The next the breeze caught the sails of the yacht and she began to leave the Flash, while Samson, pale and foaming at the mouth, ran back on the deck and realized that Alice had seen and heard all, as he went aft, his face transformed to the demoniacal look it wore when he was furiously angry.

In a moment his iron will had resumed its self-control, and he said hastily to Alice and the judge:

"I beg a thousand pardons for my violence, but you don't know the customs of the sea as I do, and that man intended a gross and deadly insult to ye both. He saw Alice on the deck here, and made that impudent inquiry on purpose to insult us. He is notorious for just such conduct, because he thinks he can do as he pleases, being a rich man and owning a paper. But I'll teach him—I'll teach him, if he dares come alongside of us again. Judge, I must ask you to take Alice below till this is over. I am obliged to use strong language at sea, or the men would not understand me."

"Certainly, certainly," said Judge Mason in a great hurry. "Alice, my dear, let's go down. Oh, this is infamous!"

He hurried Alice down-stairs, the girl looking frightened and bewildered, while Darke muttered to himself, grinding his teeth:

"Curse ye, Ned Norwood, ye haven't got her yet!"

He seemed to be put to his wits by the sudden apparition of the man he knew to be legally married to Alice already, and to be the only man living that held the proofs in his hands.

Only a little while before he had been content to let Ned Norwood alone, and trust to the chapter of accidents to keep him away till he had married Alice. Now he was set on killing Norwood, and marrying Alice at any hazard.

"She doesn't know yet," he said to himself, as he paced the deck and watched the yacht hovering in the distance. "If I can only get her to shore—Ay, I have it. Into the fog when we get to the Banks, and then, Ned Norwood, good-by."

He saw that by his sudden explosion he had thoroughly astonished and confounded the yacht-owner, who thought he had to deal with a madman, and was not likely to try any more conversations.

"If he comes again when they're below," he thought, "I'll swear boldly I am married. The fool does not know it yet, and if he thinks I am, her husband he won't expose her to disgrace for bigamy. Oh, why were they on deck? Why did I lose my head like that?"

He saw the yacht hovering alee, yawing to and fro to avoid drawing ahead, and he thought to himself:

"Oh, if I only had a gun and dared sink her. Why are we not in the days of the old pirates again?"

He took his glass and eyed the Nonpareil closely. She was not over three cable-lengths away and he could see the owner, a tall, slender, handsome fellow, with the devil-may-care look of a rich man who enjoys his money.

He could see Ned Norwood, too, though he would not have recognized him had he not seen him close before.

Ned was altered very much, thin and very brown, as if he had been tanned in the sun. His face was clean-shaven, save for a small mustache, and he wore a sort of uniform which completely altered his looks.

He seemed to be on a footing of confidence with the yacht-owner, for they were talking together very earnestly apart from the men, and it jumped to Darke's mind:

"The fellow's sailing-master of the yacht. That's how he comes to be there. I wonder what he'll do next."

He was not left to suffer long in suspense, for very soon after the yacht hoisted her light sails and began to leave the Flash at a pace that showed her to be a wonderfully swift sailer, keeping the same course as the schooner.

Samson watched her, with lowering brow, till she had got about a mile ahead, when he saw her take in her light sails again and begin to yaw to and fro, with the evident intention of not losing sight of the Flash, maintaining her place with perfect ease.

Samson sailed steadily on all the long afternoon, and at evening observed before him with much satisfaction the dark fog-bank brooding over the water, that told him he had neared the Grand Bank.

"Now," he muttered, "unless you're a much smarter man than I take you to be, I'll give ye the slip, Mister Nonpareil."

He gave orders to steer straight into the fog and call him if the yacht gave any signs of approaching them, and then went down to the cabin to supper, where he found the judge and Alice looking as if they wished they had never come to sea.

But he had made up his mind what course to pursue, so he told them that the insolent owner of the Nonpareil seemed set on dogging them to play some trick, but that he (Samson) had made up his mind, if he came closer, to make him repented his impudence.

"But how?" asked the judge, aghast. "Surely we're not in a state of war, and, if we were, this vessel is not armed."

Samson laughed grimly.

"Don't you believe it, judge. I've got a few shooting-irons hid away for seals and such. He'll get all he wants. But don't ye worry about that. We won't have any fight. The days of fighting are over at sea. It's only to give him the slip; that's all. There's no law against a fellow hanging on to the skirts of another, and I suppose he thinks it's fun to annoy a man not as rich as himself, just because there's a lady aboard, and he wants to show off. But I'll be even with him some time."

He was glad to see that Alice seemed to sympathize with him heartily, and had no suspicion of the real state of things, for she was quite charming at table, and they got along splendidly till Jim Clancy whispered hoarsely down the companionway:

"Skipper, oh, skipper!"

Darke excused himself and went on deck, to find that darkness was closing in and the fog ahead close to them.

"Where's that cursed yacht?" he asked.

"Into the fog beyant, sur. She wint in just as I haled ye."

Samson considered a moment and then gave the order:

"Luff and run along the edge of the fog to the west. If we can't see her, she can't see us. We'll give her the slip. Hard alee there. Put her on the port tack and run west by south."

The Flash tacked and ran in the desired direction for nearly an hour more when it had become quite dark and Samson hauled his wind again and ran into the fog where he lowered his sails and came to anchor just as if he were on a fishing expedition in eighty fathoms water and a slight swell.

"Now," he said, "let my fine yachtsman find me if he can."

The fog closed in on them dense and damp and all was silence around them, when he told his crew to go to below and walked aft to the quarter-deck.

The red light of a cigar told him that the judge was there and he said to Mason in a low voice:

"Where's Alice?"

"Below, asleep. She gets tired very easily. What's the matter that you've come to an anchor, Darke? Anything wrong?"

Samson drew him to the waist.

"Come forward," he whispered. "I don't want her to hear. Judge, Ned Norwood's aboard that infernal yacht."

The judge started violently and nearly let his cigar drop, muttering:

"Confound him. Just as everything was going so nicely. It's too bad. How could he have got away from Havana? That officer promised he should be imprisoned."

"He's out. I saw him myself. Now, judge, one of two things has to be done. Either we give up the whole thing as a bad job and let Alice marry the worthless pauper—"

"Not to be thought of," said the judge, decidedly. "Not for a moment. She has promised to marry you and she's got to keep her word. It's even a nice legal question if you are not married already. You answered all the questions, and she would have done so, but for that unfortunate fit of sickness."

Darke listened hungrily.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, judge, very glad. It will help me in a scheme I have. That hound will never leave us now till he knows that Alice and I are fast married. Then if he comes round, I'll tear him limb from limb."

The man's eyes glared and he trembled with passion, even while he kept his voice cautiously lowered.

"Curse him!" he growled. "She would have had me if he had not come round with his boy's face and college airs. I'll kill him yet, curse him!"

"But what are we to do?" asked Mason fretfully. "I'm willing to do anything to help but here we are out at sea."

"Listen," said Darke earnestly. "We are within a few hours' sail of the island of Newfoundland. Suppos' I run her in and we go to the nearest priest. Can you coax her to consent?"

"I think I can," answered the judge rather hesitatingly, "but we must keep the secret. If once she were to get an inkling of the fact that Mr. Norwood is alive, nothing would tempt her. I never saw such blind infatuation. One might almost believe they had been secretly married."

Samson felt the cold sweat stand on his body, but he affected to laugh.

"What an idea! That is impossible. She was watched too close for that. Besides it would make no difference. They've never lived together, and the marriage might be broken mightn't it, judge?"

He listened hungrily for the answer.

"Yes," said the judge slowly, "I suppose it might, but I don't know I'd care to do it. A girl's reputation can't be trifled with. But it's no use talking of that. It's absurd, the very idea."

"Absurd! the very idea!" echoed Darke.

And just at that moment as if to clinch the words:

"Clang! CLANG!! CLANG!!!"

The invisible bell sounded aloft.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT LAST.

"My God, what's that?" cried the judge with a violent start.

Samson grasped his arm tightly, and his eyes glared savagely.

"It's he again at his devilish tricks," he growled, half to himself. "He'll not escape me this time. There's no ice now."

Then they heard the hasty muffled tramp of feet on the ladder of the forward hatch, and up tumbled the crew of the Flash in a body, talking in low excited tones.

"The bell! the bell!"

"The Fog Demon again!"

Samson whispered to the judge:

"Go below, quick. Calm her if she wakes. Tell her 'tis a passing ship. Be off. I'll attend to them."

Then he went forward among the men and said scornfully:

"Ye cowards. Haven't we beat that bell before, and can't we do it again? 'Tis a trick and I know it—"

"Cling! CLANG! CLANG!!!"

The bell sounded again much nearer, and Samson added:

"'Tis a vessel, the yacht I doubt not. She is trying to frighten us. Heave up the anchor and make sail lively. She shall not cut us down at our own ground."

The men flew to their work with an alacrity that showed how welcome was the order, and the sails were hoisted with a speed they had never felt save in a grave emergency.

The windlass clanked like mad, and in a few moments they felt the tug of the anchor leaving its bed, and the Flash fell off under the light air and began to move to the southwest out of the fog as they all supposed.

But the mist only seemed to become thicker as they advanced, till Jim Clancy on the lookout suddenly yelled:

"Hard a-starboard! 'Ware the yacht!"

The next moment out of the mist, with lights at her mast-heads and all along the rails, the ghostly form of the yacht made its appearance gliding across the bow of the schooner.

Samson Darke was close to the wheel, and as Baptiste tried to obey Jim's hail, the skipper of the Flash seized the spokes with a hand of iron, growling:

"Keep her steady, curse you! We'll cut the cursed trickster down."

He knew that his own vessel was built with great strength to resist the storms and ice of the winter, while the yacht was sure to be lightly constructed for speed.

With a grim smile on his face he held his course straight on in the fog, aiming straight for the waist of the yacht.

In another moment, high up in the tops of the beautiful schooner clanged the bell which had frightened them all so much, and Darke shouted:

"Aha! I've found ye at last!"

Then the jib-boom of the Flash passed between the masts of the stranger, there was a crashing of timbers, followed by a cry of horror from all on board the stricken vessel, and Darke left the wheel and ran forward, shouting:

"Now ye'll play demon on me, will ye? Go to the bottom, curse ye!"

He picked up a handspike as he went, and rushed to the bow of his own vessel to find the jib-boom broken short off, the jib hanging in folds, while the Nonpareil and Flash drifted helplessly together down the wind.

The men of the yacht were running to and fro as if panic-stricken, shouting out contradictory orders to each other, and in the midst of it all he saw Ned Norwood and the owner of the Nonpareil trying to restore order.

In a moment the devil rose up in the soul of Samson Darke, and with a bound he was on the rail of the Flash, whirling his handspike and shouting:

"I've got ye now, Ned Norwood! Come on

like a man, and I'll show ye Samson Darke can wipe the deck with ye!"

"Liar!" cried Ned as fiercely as himself, "you've played me false, and you're a cowardly murderer! Where's Alice?"

"In my ship, my wife," cried Darke in an exulting tone. "Go to the bottom where ye belong, ye white-handed lubber—"

He was interrupted by a wild shriek from the quarter-deck of the Flash and looked round in his surprise for a moment. There stood the judge and Alice, roused by the shock of the collision, and he knew they must have heard all.

At that moment a puff of wind struck the Nonpareil and a crashing of timbers followed. Samson saw that the vessels were drifting apart and saw too that his scheme of vengeance had failed.

The Nonpareil was cut open nearly to the water's edge, but not quite. She could not stand any heavy sea, but might float forever in the calm that then existed.

Realizing in a moment that exposure was certain, and rendered frantic by the sight of Ned Norwood, the giant gathered all his strength into one mighty leap and sprung for the decks of the yacht, just as a second puff of wind struck her and heeled her over from the Flash.

That puff was his ruin. But for it, he would have gained the deck. As it was, he missed his aim and struck the slippery side of the schooner, going down like a shot into the deep water under the two schooners.

A moment later he felt himself to be attacked by hundreds of cruel snapping mouths, and he fought desperately to gain the surface. Too well he knew what had happened!

He was in the midst of a school of hungry dog-fish, where all his mighty strength was useless.

He felt them tearing away all over him, and roared aloud in his agony, leaping half out of the water and shrieking for help in vain.

Only once did he rise, with the ravenous creatures hanging on him like bull-dogs, and then—

Down he went and no human eye ever saw Samson Darke again.

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

EVEN Ned Norwood was paralyzed with horror when he saw the sudden and horrible end of his relentless foe. But for the restraining hands of his men he was ready to leap in to rescue Samson, only hearing the man's shrieks, and fancying that he could not swim. He shouted for a rope, and threw over the end of one of the halyards, but it was too late, and as he peered down into the dark waters he saw the furious creatures fighting on the surface, mad with hunger for the fragments, and realized what had happened.

Then he turned to his friend, the owner of the yacht, and said in tones of horror:

"My God, Mr. Stannard, the dog-fish have torn him to pieces."

"Better him than you or me," returned Stannard. "I believe the man must have been a maniac to try and run us down. See, his schooner's bow is all stove in."

Then the wind drove the two vessels a little further apart in the fog, and Ned shouted:

"Schooner ahoy! Any damage done to you?"

"God knows," returned a plaintive Irish voice, "it's myself don't. The skipper's gone to blazes, and that's all I know. Oh, Holy Mother! why did we ever come into the fog after that murthering bell?"

"Look to your bows," cried Ned, anxiously. "Your cutwater's all stove in, and I'm afraid she's leaking."

Jim uttered a shout to his mates:

"Holy fathers! the Flash is sinkin' and we'll be all 'aten by the dog-fishes. Man the pump, for the love of the Virgin."

And the clang of the instrument followed almost immediately, while Ned examined the gaping wound in the side of the Nonpareil and told Stannard gravely:

"We've only six inches left between us and death. She's cut down to within that distance of the water line, and if it comes on to blow, salt won't save us."

Stannard was one of those reckless young millionaires who rather court danger than otherwise, and he answered lightly:

"Never mind. If she goes down we can take to the boats. We're not far from the shore, I reckon."

"Too far to make a sure thing of it with the Banks swarming with dog-fish," said Ned gravely, "and besides that I'm afraid that schooner's going down too."

"Serve her right," returned Stannard in a vindictive tone. "She ought to go down, coming running into a man on purpose. I wish I'd never come near that mad fool of a skipper, Norwood."

"He's gone," answered Ned, "but there are those aboard who are the cause of all his wickedness without any intent of theirs, and among others a woman."

"Good heavens, yes. I forgot that," said the young yachtsman hastily. "Take a boat and

go aboard, Norwood. If she needs help, give it, of course."

So Ned took the large comfortable boat of the Nonpareil, built on purpose for stability in any sea, rather than for speed, and rowed over to the Flash, passing round under her bow to examine the injuries there.

As he had expected, he found these serious. The low speed at which the Flash had been going and the fact that the Nonpareil was built with great strength by her owner had combined to divide the injuries of the collision more equally than is generally the case in such affairs.

Usually the vessel that goes bow on escapes severe damage and the one that is struck gets the worst of it.

At high speed this is certain to be the case. But if the bow be at all weak or if the blow come obliquely at low speed the injury is sometimes reversed.

The Flash had managed to strike the side of the Nonpareil in such a way that her cutwater was stove in and one of her anchors had been driven from the cathead to which it was hanging and swung in under the water line, cutting a large jagged hole into which the water was pouring fast.

Ned saw that the Flash must fill in less than an hour, and he rowed hastily round to the gangway, climbed aboard and found the men hard at work at the pumps while Judge Mason and his daughter stood clinging together, as if bewildered and terrified to the last degree.

Ned touched his hat to the judge coldly.

"I come from the yacht alongside, sir," he said. "Your vessel will not float long. You'd best put the lady in my boat and come aboard the Nonpareil."

"Thank you, sir," returned the judge in a nervous way. "You are—Captain Darke is—ah!"

"Captain Darke's dead, sir," retorted Ned in his harshest tone. "He went down beside the very vessel he tried to sink and Mrs. Darke is a widow."

He spoke with intense bitterness for he believed that Alice had played him false.

The judge stammered out:

"Mrs. Darke, sir? I do not quite understand you. Darke was not—not married."

"Not married?" echoed Ned, his face lighting up. "Not married. He swore he married your daughter—"

Then turning to Alice who had shrunk back, pale and trembling on her father's arm, he added:

"You may thank God, Judge Mason, that you did not force this helpless girl to commit bigamy. Come to me, Alice. From henceforth no concealment. The time has gone by for that. Judge, this lady is my wife."

And before the judge could say a word the lovers were clasped in each other's arms murmuring: "At last."

They had forgotten all about the leak, the sinking vessel, the sea swarming with hungry monsters.

Norwood only remembered that Alice was true still.

Alice only thought that Ned was alive.

A few more words and our story is done.

The Cuban rebellion collapsed as all the world knows, and in the final battle Don Juan de Saluda, after a desperate but unavailing resistance was obliged to flee the field and make for the plantation of his father.

He found Norwood there unwilling to leave Isidora within sound of the conflict that was still raging.

The young Cuban was still unwounded and he told his friend hastily:

"All is lost. Flee while you can. Stannard is waiting at Sangre Cristo. For me and Isidora we have other work to do. There is yet a chance in the interior."

Norwood, only too glad to be relieved of the responsibility of his beautiful but very jealous charge, managed to slip off without bidding her adieu and rode like a madman on a stolen horse for the bay of Sangre Cristo.

When he got there he found Stannard's yacht at anchor with her sails loosened, all ready to trip and be off.

He got aboard in the character of a negro, but as soon as he introduced himself to Stannard as the correspondent who had made so much trouble for the Spaniards he was welcomed with open arms.

Stannard was on the lookout for just such men, and immediately offered him a position on the yacht as sailing-master, private secretary, and half a dozen other capacities, entailing a great deal of work, but drawing proportionate pay.

The Cuban insurrection having collapsed all of Stannard's interest went with it, for he was, above all things, a live owner of a live newspaper who never troubled himself about what was lost.

He sailed for the States as soon as it became plain that the Cuban bonds in which he had been speculating were irremediably gone, and said to Norwood as they went:

"No use crying over spilt milk. But there are some poor devils still left on the Banks,

poking about in the fog after Spanish vessels. We must take them off or they'll be adjudged pirates."

It was in search of the remnant of Saluda's companions that the Nonpareil was sailing when she came across the Flash, and Norwood recognized the cut of the schooner in a moment from a peculiarly shaped fore-topsail she carried, and asked Stannard if he might not run down to speak her.

He had the idea of finding if Darke was married to Alice, in which case he had made up his mind to hide his identity and disappear forever.

He had told his story to Stannard before, and the young millionaire had promised him what help he could give.

When he received such a savage reply, Stannard was at first tempted to resort to physical force to resent the insult, for the yacht was heavily manned for her size, and had not been cruising in Cuban waters without being prepared to resist annoyance.

But when Ned suggested that he had seen a woman on board, and that such a course would be likely to harm her, Stannard saw the point and assented.

It was necessary to get an answer out of Darke without exposing Norwood to the view of Alice.

That was the whole problem.

"If she has married him," said Stannard, in his practical way, "it's no use crying over spilt milk, Norwood. You don't want to prosecute her for bigamy and make a scandal, and you don't want her back, either. You just slide off on the quiet and let me manage the thing."

It was the bell of the Nonpareil, sent to the mast-head on a whip, and rung there, that had so startled the men on the Flash. It was Stannard's object to rouse their superstition and frighten them out of the fog, if possible, so that he might hang on their skirts till the question was answered. He remembered how Saluda had used the trick with effect.

Unluckily, he had lost track of the Flash in the fog, and had come across her, as we have seen, just in time to be run into.

From the time Ned announced that Alice was his wife, the judge seemed to be overcome and thunderstruck.

The same man who on shore would have treated Ned with haughty superiority, found the tables turned, now they were at sea.

The young man was master there, and when he took Alice under his arm, saying, "This is my wife, sir," Judge Mason could only ejaculate:

"God bless my soul!"

They said no more till Alice was safe in the boat, with the judge in the stern-sheets, rowing to the Nonpareil, when he managed to get out:

"You say you're married. Where is the certificate?"

"Here next my heart," said Ned, "where I've kept it all this time."

Alice nestled up a little closer to him and whispered:

"Ah Ned, if I'd had it, we should both have escaped a great deal of doubt and misery."

"Never mind," he answered. "It's all over now. Here's the yacht."

The Flash did not sink, after all, no more did the Nonpareil.

The fishing-schooner, being light, sunk till her rail touched the water's edge, and then hung, unable to sink any further.

All night long, under direction of young Norwood, the crews of both vessels were patching up the hole in the side of the Nonpareil, so that the yacht could go to sea again, and they managed to do it so effectually, that she was able to make the trip to Gloucester itself, where she arrived two days later, towing the water-logged Flash behind her.

Ned and Alice are happy now, and Ned is known as the best correspondent on the *New York Grouler*, and Judge Mason weakened as soon as he found that his son-in-law drew a salary of six thousand dollars a year.

THE END.

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